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WORDS IN COLLISION

The decay of rhythm, rhyme, and reason

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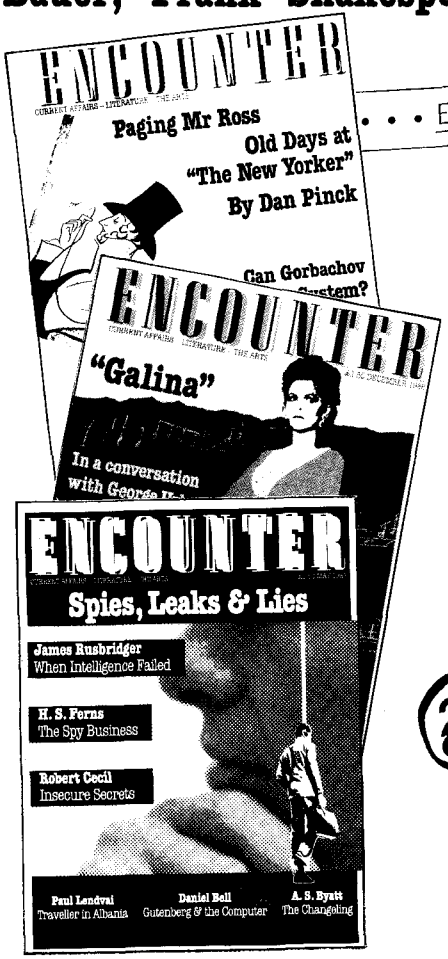

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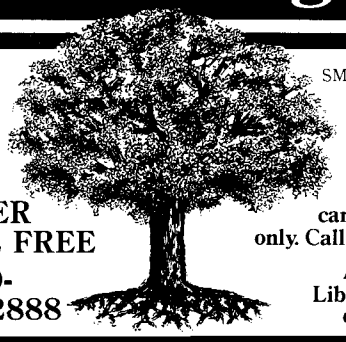

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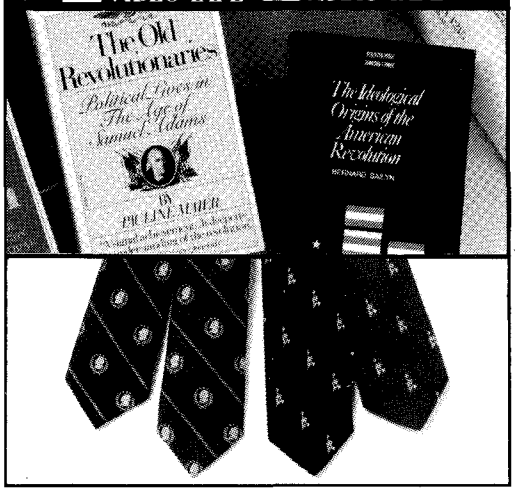
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Gary Hart has withdrawn to the seclusion of his Rocky Mountain home, claiming that the nation's press, led by the *Miami Herald*, invaded his privacy. Donna Rice, an aspiring actress suddenly in the limelight, is spending most of her time denying to any reporter who will listen that there was anything immoral in her relationship with Hart. The national media, for the most part, is treating the rise and fall of the onetime front-runner as if it were nothing more than a morality play.

Yet the Hart debacle raises issues far more serious than whether or not Gary Hart, or any presidential candidate, has ever cheated on his wife, and the press's proper role in reporting this. The ramifications for national security, for the American family, and for the AIDS epidemic should be taken into account as we approach election year.

Former Senator Hart first attempted to play down the furor over his reported liaison with Ms. Rice with wan humor. He told the audience at a New York fund-raiser on May 5th that "After the past few days, I'll look forward to negotiating with Mikhail Gorbachev!"

How does he know he hadn't been? The reason why British Defense Secretary John Profumo and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt were driven from office was not because their extramarital affairs had offended puritanical elements within their countries. Rather it was because their questionable conduct had exposed them to the possibility of Soviet blackmail. Like our Moscow embassy, they were compromised.

The Hart organization displayed a naive disregard for even elemental considerations of security. By their own admission, attractive young women were interviewed for campaign positions one afternoon, spent that night in the home of high-ranking campaign officials, and were admitted immediately to the closest circles surrounding a would-be Commander in Chief. All this on the basis of what Mr. Hart himself called "only a casual relationship." How can we expect a teenage Marine at our Moscow embassy to be on his guard against KGB entrapment when a presidential candidate sets such a casual example?

On the domestic front, there is probably no issue as important as the American family. Our staggering welfare bill is stark testimony to its decay. Bill Moyers interviewed a young, single man named Timmy and was shocked to discover that he had fathered six children—two aborted and the rest, with their mothers, on welfare. The number of Timmys, young men ready to father children but unwilling to be a father to them, is growing in direct proportion to the decline of respect for the institution of the family.

Like all candidates, Hart presented himself as the consummate family man. He kicked off his campaign surrounded by his smiling family. As the pressure mounted for him to explain his relationship with Ms. Rice, it was his wife who went on nationwide TV in his defense. Yet the life-style revealed by the press showed a man who preferred to spend even his leisure time outside the family circle.

The question here is not primarily one of hypocrisy but of a need for leaders who not only believe in the family but exemplify it in their own lives. The road out of the ghetto runs through the family, not the welfare office. The leader who, by precept and example, teaches the Timmys of this country respect for the family will be offering the hope of a better life to them, their consorts, and their illegitimate children, besides helping to balance the federal budget by reducing the number of singletons on the welfare roles.

The flip side of the family issue is the allegation, always implicit, of adulterous behavior. This has by and large been handled by the press as a narrow and not overly important question of Hart's personal morality. Yet here again there are larger issues at stake.

The specter of AIDS, called by President Reagan our number one public health problem, has raised the stakes for premarital and extramarital sex. Surgeon General Koop and Secretary of Education William Bennett both agree on the need for abstinence or for stable, monogamous relationships as the primary means of combating this insidious disease.

The issue is not what former Senator Hart did or didn't do with Ms. Rice during the evening in his townhouse or the night on board his friend's yacht. Let us take Hart at his word when he protests their innocence. The issue is rather the impression made by a presidential candidate when he casually engages in such encounters.

Values are as often "caught" as they are taught. Is the Hart example likely to strengthen or weaken those patterns of behavior which alone can control the spread of the AIDS epidemic? Are young people, who consciously or not look to our leadership for what is permissible and what is not, more or less likely to avoid a promiscuity which can kill?

Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future. America is not in the business of electing only paragons of virtue for its highest office. But where epidemics, such as AIDS, or social breakdown, such as a decay of the American family, or foreign threats to the security of the nations are present, then the President must take the lead in confronting them, not only in words, but also in deeds. These are *the* issues of the late 80's, the successful resolution of which will go far towards ensuring the future health, welfare, and security of the United

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States. Any presidential candidate ignores them to his political peril.

—by Steven W. Mosher, director of the Asian Studies Center at the Claremont Institute in Montclair and author of Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese *and* Journey to the Forbidden China.

James Burnham, R.I.P. He was a controversialist. As a literary critic he argued with T.S. Eliot, and as a Trotskyist he quarreled with Trotsky himself. Almost alone among the ex-Communists, he made the full journey to a conservative world view, and before his death he returned to the Catholic faith.

He wrote many books, some of which will not be soon forgotten: *Congress and the American Tradition*, *The Suicide of the West*, and *The Managerial Revolution*. This last, written just after his defection from Communism, remains the most powerful theoretical analysis of the *coups d'etat* that overtook the governments of Germany, Italy, Russia, and the United States. Moderate defenders of the welfare state shudder—and rightly so—when Burnham's name is mentioned. He knew a revolution when he saw one and recognized the New Deal for what it was, the American version of national socialism.

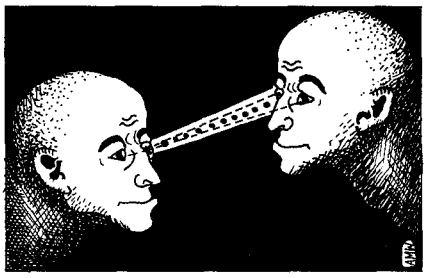
In his later years, as senior editor at *National Review*, Burnham became the most trenchant of cold warriors. For him containment could never be a solution. The free West had to commit itself to driving the Soviet Union back within its borders.

There was no cant in him, and if he had little patience for political philosophy, it was because political theories were so often little better than slogans designed to cover the libido dominandi. He frankly called himself a Machiavellian, and his name would be worth commemorating if his only accomplishment had been to introduce the insights of Machiavelli, Pareto, and Mosca into contemporary political discourse.

Burnham has few followers today. The halfhearted anti-Communists who twitter about democratic globalism would have affected him with equal measures of disgust, amusement, and despair. Of those who presume to follow his footsteps, Samuel Francis may be the only really faithful disciple, and Francis' *Power and History* remains the best introduction to Burnham's thought.

I met James Burnham only once for a brief moment at the Ingersoll Prizes banquet in 1983, when he was being honored as the first recipient of the Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters. The Eliot winner that year was Jorge Borges. There they were in an extravagant Chicago hotel, standing together, two grand old men with visions of the world so powerful, so lucid, and so terrifying that few of us in this enfeebled age dare dart a glance at them. (TF)

Video stores may be socialism's most recent victim. In a recent *Heartland Perspective*, William Irvine notes that public libraries are now taking a bite out of the $3.4 billion video tape rental business and cites the obvious parallel of public and private libraries. In the last century, there was a host of



private libraries offering a wide variety of reading for relatively low fees. While some specialty libraries did endure (I have belonged to three simultaneously), most were driven out of business by the government libraries that depend on tax dollars. The results of socialized reading are no better than we could have expected. Primarily they serve as powerful agents for the degradation of reading tastes. Walk into a local library some time, as I have done all over the country, and attempt to check out some obscure fact in a standard reference book or to look up a quotation from Polybius. Sorry, no German encyclopedias and no Greek. You will find multiple copies of last year's best-sellers, teenage sex

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manuals, and books on every conceivable hobby. You will not find, however, anything but the most popular works on any serious subject. What is worse, librarians have a nasty habit of retiring good old books—instead of rebinding them—in order to make room for Jane Fonda tapes. When complaints are made, librarians take refuge either in democracy—"We're only buying what people want"—or freedom of expression—"We have to stock the *Playboy Reader*; you don't believe in censorship, do you?"

It would be a comfort to believe that a cadre of literate and decent people could some day seize control of the nation's libraries. Unfortunately, librarians constitute as entrenched a bureaucratic class as teachers whom they resemble in many ways: Committed to the managerial state that overpays them, they react like scorpions to any suggestions made from the outside. There is only one solution for public libraries as there is for public schools: take away their—I should say *our*—money. (Irvine's paper, "The Rise and Fall of the Video Store," is available from The Heartland Institute, 59 East Van Buren, #810, Chicago, IL 60605.) (TF)

Harems have always been a sign of power in the Middle East. Sultans and sheiks with the most wives and concubines are usually in charge of the country's political and economic fortunes. In contemporary America, however, rich and powerful American men do not keep harems, and most of us would prefer to keep it that way. Still, in the rising number of young women "wedded" to the state, we may discern the emergence of a sort of government "harem," troubling for its size and for the cultural and social realignments it suggests.

Neither exotic nor erotic, the American government's "harem" does not consist of sultry beauties living in palatial luxury but of impoverished single mothers who rely upon the state as a surrogate "husband" and provider. The state is far from generous with its welfare wives and may enact "workfare" proposals requiring them to do harder things than belly dancing. Yet the number of the state's wives keeps growing. Two reasons for the growth of the state harem stand out. The first is divorce.

In recent decades, America has witnessed a cultural revolution in casual divorce. A recent Harris poll reassured us that of all American marriages in existence only one in eight will end in divorce. The trouble is that recent marriages have done far worse than older ones. A study for the Center for Population Research predicts that over 40 percent of marital unions formed in the 1980's will end in divorce. And as Stanford researcher Lenore Weitzman has shown, one in seven divorced women must rely upon the government as a substitute provider, at least temporarily.

The second and larger reason for the growth of the state's harem is illegitimacy. Since 1960, the number of children born out of wedlock has tripled, surging to flood tide among teen mothers. This jump in illegitimate fertility is all the more dramatic in a society which has seen its overall birthrate plummet to well below replacement levels. In 1960 only 5 percent of American births were illegitimate; today the figure is 21 percent. Among the approximately three in five unwed mothers who must turn to the state for support, the average period of welfare dependence is over nine years, according to a recent government analysis.

What we are seeing is the emergence of the "mother-state-child family" as a widespread social arrangement, competing with—and to some degree undermining—families based on marriage. The growing number of such families dooms many children to lives of grinding poverty, even as it imposes an economic strain on parents who must support their own children, while at the same time paying taxes to support the state's harem.

Government wives stand a good chance of never escaping from poverty. Recent studies show that married people escape from poverty much more often than singles but that women on welfare rarely attract husbands. And because the daughters of women wedded to the state are two and a half times as likely to participate in premarital sex than the daughters of intact marriages, even more young women in the next generation will likely end up in this dismal harem.

Since a major component of the problem is unwed teenage mothers, bringing teen marriage back may be the easiest way to free young mothers from welfare dependency. Indeed, in a recent issue of *The Public Interest*, Maris Vinovskis proposes that the government begin subsidizing teen marriages as a way to reduce the country's welfare crisis. Since three-fourths of white teen marriages (and one half of black) survive at least 10 years, Vinovskis thinks it makes sense for government to "finance these young marriages while both parents continue their education."

Even if the government would make a good matchmaker—a highly dubious proposition—such a move would disastrously increase government control of family life—which is the problem to begin with. Far better if parents, churches, and local communities encouraged and economically supported teen marriages. In any case, a teenage girl who is going to have a baby will probably get married. The question is, who will be the groom: the father of her child or the polygamous state? (BC)

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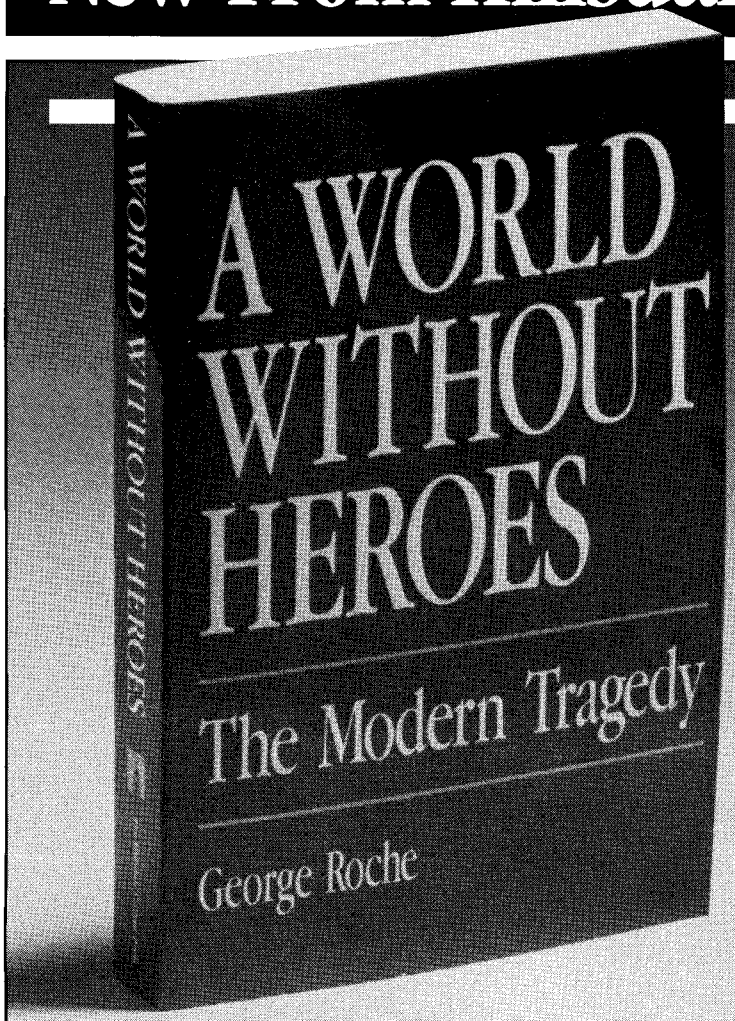

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THE PRICE OF FREE VERSE *by Thomas Fleming*

"A poet in our times," wrote Thomas Love Peacock, "is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community." What Peacock meant by civilized community is not too hard to guess: that rational, humane, progressive society of Britain and Northern Europe, which Peacock's eccentric friends—Shelley, Coleridge, and Byron—all seemed bent on destroying. Poets were barbaric, because they continued to celebrate heroic violence and religious superstition in a society of steam locomotives and parliamentary commissions.

Of the barbarian qualities of verse, Peacock failed to mention the most characteristic—rhythm. There may be poetic traditions in which the regular alternation of strong and weak elements played no part, but Peacock and his Romantic friends knew nothing of them. (Since much lyric poetry is actually song, even if a text appears to lack formal rhythm, the song probably did not.) The quantitative rhythms of Greek and Latin (relying on the oscillation of long and short syllables) and the accentual rhythms of Germanic languages (including English), while they differ in so many respects that Nabokov thought it pointless to apply Greek terms like "iambic" to English verse, they still share this one essential quality: the predictable rise and fall of light and heavy, weak and strong that echoes the beat of our heart and the patterns of light and dark, cold and hot, life and death by which our existence is ordered.

All savages and barbarians love to sing and dance, including the savage children of our semicivilized race, and the Greeks did not clearly distinguish among the three rhythmic arts of verse, dance, and song. Next to Homeric epic, the greatest of ancient poetry was designed as song and dance routines: the odes of Pindar and the great lyric passages of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes. When critics came to devise a language to describe poetic rhythm, the words themselves had to be derived from the terms used by dance-trainers and chorus masters. We still speak of feet as well as arsis and thesis, usually without any sense of the original connection.

In civilized Athens, the most popular literary form may have been the dithyramb, an ode in honor of Dionysius that was sung and danced by a chorus of 50 male citizens. What survives of the Theban poet Pindar's dithyramb for the Athenians provides eloquent testimony to the powerful place that such poetry had in the life of the city. The extravagant and passionate language—the ancient critics called such a style "dithyrambic"—awakens echoes of earlier times when Greek religion bound its participants in the barbaric ceremonies of blood. Some of the effect may come out in a modern "imitation" of two dithyrambic fragments:

Pindar in Athens

Pindar called the gods down from Olympus
to sanctify his chorus in holy Athens—
where the city's heart was mobbed and fuming with incense—
and join them there in the marketplace. What
did the poet offer them? Crowns twisted from violets
and songs plucked from the Springtime as he went in a splendor
of music that comes only from Zeus, up to the god
sprouting ivy, the thunder mortals interpret as shouting
in our dazed blood: Dionysius; singing praises of the son
of the highest father and Cadmus' daughter.

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In those days the hills revealed themselves to be the prophet,
when the chamber of seasons dressed in scarlet opened
to let in the spring with its nectar-brimming flowers.
Then, yes then, on the undying earth they flung
tresses of lilacs, roses were braided in hair,
and an unearthly voice echoed to flutes as choirs made their way
to crown Semele,
her sorrows ended at last.
Pindar the hog
from the Boeotian outback glimpsed the gods
in the blinding light off the hills of Athens haloed
in violet, the fortress of Hellas against the East,
when the sons of Athenians laid the foundations of liberty
at Marathon, Salamis, and off Cape Artemisium,
remembered by their stepsons in the days of our freedom.

In English as much as in Greek, poetry is rhythmic speech. Good poetry is something more, but it is never anything less. All the other devices of verse—symbol and metaphor, plot and character, rhetorical argument, rhyme and alliteration—are available to writers of prose. (In the ancient world, rhyme in particular was typically a prose technique.) While good prose is often rhythmical, especially toward the end of a sentence, it can never display a regular rhythm without becoming poetry.

Simple people have always grasped the fundamental connection between rhythm and poetry. Popular songs, proverbs, prayers, and advertising jingles all tend to be cast in rhythmic form. (In modern languages, they also rhyme.) A trivial observation or the tritest of platitudes, when expressed in verse, assume a power that is unrelated either to the thought or the expression. How else to explain the persistence of "a stitch in time saves nine" or the popularity of rapping?

On this point Aristotle made an uncharacteristic error. Disdaining the popular Greek attitude that identified poetry with rhythmical expression, the philosopher groped for more functional definitions that would describe the object (rather than the nature) of poetry and only succeeded in misleading countless generations of critics and scholars ever since. In their search for a metaphysical explanation, critics came to define poetry in such a way as to include only the most sublime and perfect examples by the same train of thought that leads us to regard intelligence as the only truly human attribute. Coleridge insisted that "poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre." One might just as well say that computers are more human than half-wits. It is a serious mistake to define anything not by what it is but by what it can become: We leave out the essentials. To leave out any reference to rhythm in a definition of poetry is like omitting tone from a discussion of music. It is precisely because they ignore the most obvious and fundamental property of their subject that writers on poetics so readily fly off into "faery lands forlorn."

The obvious advantage of such an approach is the opportunity for creativity it affords the critic. Most critics and literary critics could not write a passable schoolboy couplet, and yet they proceed to write grandly of technique or sound/sense echoes. Without ever baking a loaf or eating a slice of bread, they discourse with a gourmet's affectation on the qualities of wheat and the effect of bricks in the oven. One unintended effect of this search for the genuinely poetic is that poetry has come to be linked with everything that would be unsavory in prose. The worst thing one can say about a novelist's style is that it is "poetic," by which we usually intend to signify a certain straining after effect, long-winded descriptions, and a flair for inappropriate metaphor. (Lawrence Durrell, Thomas Wolfe, and John Updike are among the most "poetic" prose writers of the century.)

By sticking to the most prominent facts, a powerful theory of poetry might be constructed. An important first step in this direction was taken by Frederick Turner (himself an interesting poet) in collaboration with a neurophysiologist. In an article on rhythm in *Poetry* several years ago, Turner backed up his declaration that all poetry was rhythmical with evidence that the brain responds differently to rhythmical verse than it does to prose or (what amounts to the same thing) free verse.

Some of what is called "free verse" is actually not all that free. Eliot's imitations of *vers libre* typically have the quality of blank verse that has been broken up rhetorically and declaimed by an actor, and there are passages in *The Four Quartets* that are quite regular. Eliot's lead, in English at least, has been followed by a great many conservative poets, and it is impossible to say that this technique is entirely unsuccessful. There are, however, two major drawbacks.

In the first place, the poet becomes his own interpreter and deprives the reader or reciter of some of the freedom to impose his own voice upon the text. With Laforgue and Eliot, one often has the sensation of being led by the nose down a flight of stairs. But that is a minor point. A more serious consequence of *vers libre* is that the poet is never compelled to learn his craft completely. There is no rhythmical effect in Eliot that was not possible in traditional verse, but the opposite is not true. Dryden and Browning had at their disposal dozens of rhythmic modulations which are only available within the rigid framework of expectation imposed by strictly metrical verse.

Consider the question of syllabic quantity. The first syllable of "butter" is counted as a stress as much as the first syllable of "grandstand," although the latter is much longer and harder to say. Inspired by ancient poets, Tennyson did a great deal with quantity, but his studied effects would all fail in any scheme of versification that did not (like traditional English verse) number both syllables and stresses, because we can only really appreciate quantity as a secondary phenomenon, a variation upon the strict pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. *Vers libre*, by liberating itself from mechanical counting, is often reduced to making itself merely poetic or to using the simplest, not to say vulgar, jingles. (One has only to turn to "Prufrock" for intentional examples.)

A far more succesful alternative to traditional verse is found in Gerald Manley Hopkins and his imitators, who give up the un-Germanic insistence upon counting syllables and treat the so-called tetrameter and pentameter lines as an affair of four and five stresses. In Hopkins the effects are often magnificent: *Summer ends; now, barbarous in beauty, the stooks arise.*

It is not, unfortunately, always this good, and Hopkins took his theory to such absurd lengths that it is impossible to read his observations on rhythm—with all their strange

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crotchets and quavers—without amused impatience, but that is also true of almost everything written on meter—whether Greek, Latin, or English. It is a field divided between metaphysical theorists (all linguists fall in this category) and pedantic collectors of useless data. The only way to learn about rhythm is by reading and writing verse.

Some 20th-century poets learned a great deal from Hopkins and even improved upon the master. I do not know to what extent Robinson Jeffers had meditated upon these questions, but even a minor poem of his, like "The Bloody Sire," shows an almost perfect command of the technique:

> It is not bad. Let them play.
> Let the dogs bark and the bombing-plane
> Speak his prodigious blasphemies.
> It is not bad, it is high time.
> Stark violence is still the sire of all the world's values.

By limiting himself to four stresses and varying the pattern and number of unstressed syllables, Jeffers achieves some of the effects of Greek lyric. An ancient metrist, who translated Jeffers' pattern of accents into quantitative terms, would have been able to cite parallel passages in Sophocles and Euripides, but an untutored reader can feel the rhythmic power quite as much as the classicist.

Jeffers' ability to stir the blood against foreign wars or imperialism was not unrelated to his rhythms. Other British and American poets have helped to shape the minds of their contemporaries on a host of religious, moral, social, and political questions. Would there have been a British or American mind (by which I mean a shared conscience) without Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson? Great poets do more than reflect reality: They recreate it in the minds of their audience. Without poets we are faced with a stale world recreated in the civilized platitudes of politicians and preachers.

I know of no great and free people that has not debated its issues and defined its consensus in verse more than in prose. Greek drama, Roman satire and epic, and the reflective lyric verse of Britain and America were all the literatures of free and vigorous nations. Themistocles had his Aeschylus, Augustus his Vergil, Elizabeth her Shakespeare. The last hurrah may have been Robert Frost's appearance at the Kennedy inauguration at which the great conservative gave the lie to all the citizen-of-the-world patriotism that infected Kennedy and every President since:

> Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
> (the deed of gift was many deeds of war)
> to the land vaguely realizing Westward,
> but still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
> such as she was, such as she would become.

It was not until theorists and bunglers hit upon free verse that poetry lost all social and political significance during the great "revolution" of the 60's, students did not regale each other with recitations of Allen Ginsberg's "Wichita Vortex Sutra." They were listening to Crosby, Stills, and Nash (how hard it was to escape "Judy Blue Eyes" throughout 1969 in San Francisco!) or Bob Dylan. Even Ginsberg knew this and inserted Dylan's music into the performance of his free verse excrescence. And the reactionaries were not quoting Robert Lowell or even Richard Wilbur (a poet who understands rhythm). They were listening to the Beatles mock "Revolution" or hearing with astonishment, as I did, for the first time, on the way to the infamous free Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, California, Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee."

If poetry—good and bad—is rhythmical speech, then it is small wonder that popular singers were able to shape the national imagination to an extent undreamed of by most contemporary American poets, who still give their classes lectures on the social significance of literature. Even they knew it is not so. If a poet was once a free man singing to a free people, he is now an underpaid member of a servile interest group at the beck and call of equally servile bureaucrats. If it has any effect at all, the arhythmia of modern verse can only reinforce the sense of powerlessness and anonymity which the carefully dressed men in charge would like to impose on us all. This point was not lost upon Frederick Turner, who, in the same essay, suggested that the totalitarian mind had a special affinity for free verse. Real poetry in a place like the Library of Congress would be as dangerously disruptive as the rebel yell that awakens tribal memories of semibarbarian liberty.

These are not trifling matters. A great poet cannot save the world, but what he does is as close as man can come to the divine creation of the universe. It is by the power of speech, we are told, that the universe was made: The Word became world. Other arts, like music, may be more sublime; others, like painting, capable of more perfect beauty. But it is poetry and poetry alone that takes our most human quality, language, and uses it to express the great rhythms of creation—the beat of our hearts, the ebb and flow of tides, the endless round of planets, and the vast adagio of galaxies as they make their way across the void. A man who has heard this music cannot permanently succumb to the drum and fife rhetoric of despots and demagogues. We shall never again be a free people until we have poets who sing to us in unfree verse.

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles:*

American Empire

"Our persistent refusal to see the Vietnam War as a clash of empires and our denial that America has any legitimate imperial mission or interests made it impossible for us to justify our presence in Vietnam to our own people. We deny that we are an empire; at the same time, we permit or promote the practice of the melting pot in ethnic and cutural pluralism, which makes it impossible for our country really to be a nation."

—from "The Treason System"
by Harold O.J. Brown

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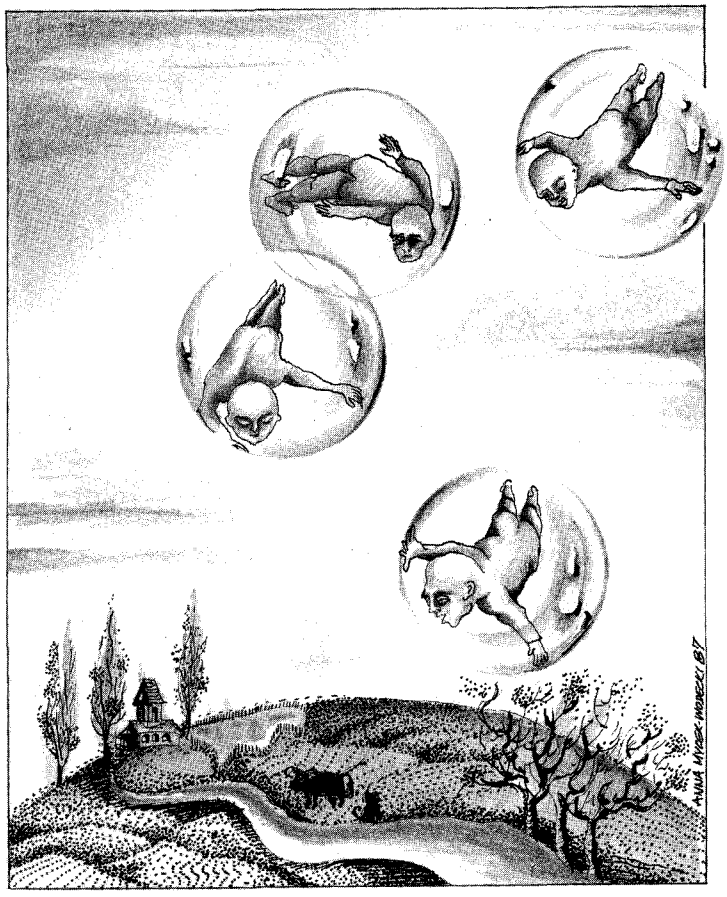
A MOUSE OR A PROMETHEUS *by Gojko Djogo*

It is said that whatever theme a poet chooses to deal with—the insignificance of a mouse or Prometheus' heroic deed—what really matters is the ways in which a certain reality, certain feelings, and certain events are transposed into a poetic image. There are few objections to this opinion—it is supported by many works of art and by a sense of a general desecration of the world and the debasement of everything sublime. The greatest accomplishments of our time are unfailingly programmed in laboratories, while our heroes are mass-produced in advertising bureaus. Myths are no longer innocent stories about miracles, nor are heroes any longer mortals with divine gifts. The awareness of human infirmity and the lost hope that life can be made more sacred generates a widespread anxiety and fear syndrome. This has its effect in spiritual spheres as well. A mouse in its hole acquires an ever-growing symbolic importance and becomes a paradigm for the social and existential status of man.



The relation between reality and its artistic image is indeed the most complex problem of the whole theory of art. If art is not a reproduction, a mere reflection of reality, neither is it something completely independent. The argument about mimesis, which began in antiquity, is still unresolved.

Aristotle advised Protogenes, the painter who was making a portrait of his mother, to take the heroic deeds of Alexander the Great for his subject—deeds the whole world was talking about then, and which it was easily predictable the world to come would also be interested in. In Aristotle's view, not all themes were equally valuable, and the artist had to choose those which would attract attention even in a remote future. Protogenes would not take his advice; he thought, as many among us still do, that themes and subjects cannot be graded according to the quantity of information they contain about a certain time.

Did the ancient painter make a mistake? If nothing else, had he listened, the portrait of Alexander the Great in our history textbooks might bear his signature; perhaps at least one of his works would have survived—although they were said to be so beautiful that Demetrius declined to storm a certain city, for fear that a Protogenes painting might be damaged in the attack. However, there are more serious reasons not to disregard Aristotle's advice. If art is a testimony and a specific mirror of history—an assertion many today agree with—then we should not forget that Alexander's accomplishments were the crucial determinants of his time and that they offered to the artist more possibilities to "capture" the Helenic spirit and to express himself as a creator and a witness than possibly any other contemporary subject.

We can only conclude that art has to deal with the important, with that which is a sign of recognition of a certain time, and which essentially determines our life. That crucial something that art speaks of is influenced, among other things, by the theme art chooses to deal with. When literature is in question, what is understood by the theme includes not only the subject but also that basic spiritual center which unifies and generates all meaning

Gojko Djogo is a Serb poet who was sentenced in 1981 to two years imprisonment in Yugoslavia for writing six poems considered slanderous of Marshal Tito.

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and which shapes the reader's intuitive and rational understanding of a literary work. The theme influences the width and the depth of an artistic message and, by its general social, ethical, or philosophical meanings, deepens the artistic value of a work of art. It is on the theme, therefore, that the verisimilitude and truthfulness of the artistic picture of history largely depend. Hence, so-called taboo themes must not exist—artistic freedom must be fully guaranteed.

In societies where that is not so, literature and art in general have a slightly different function, and artists are confronted with a multitude of problems not necessarily of an artistic nature. Any critical reference to a taboo theme provokes an unpleasant reaction. This is easy to understand. But the greatest challenge, still, is the one concerning the nature of art. An author's critical approach, implicit or explicit, also contains a more distinct artistic message, which, by its nature, lends itself to association with this or that idea. Therefore, from a sermon to the end of art, the road is neither long nor tortuous.

Though social engagement in literature has valid humanitarian and moral excuses, the doubt that such creativity is not fully integral is well-founded. The assertion, on the other hand, that an artist does not want to say anything, that he does not appeal for anything, and that the purpose of art lies only in its enjoyment is equally untenable.

Contemporary literature tries to overcome this theoretical discordance. Avoiding the sensitive question of engagement, it refrains from simple messages and assumes the role of a witness and accomplice. Its testimony endeavors to serve its highest principle—the truth.

Artistic truth differs from the historic; it is broader and multilayered, closer to the original Greek concept of "aletheia," which denotes that which is not a mistake or a lie, as well as the habit of speaking truthfully, that is, sincerely, openly, particularly, and publicly. While historic truth quite often depends on the point of view and can be limited by ideological, religious, or moral barriers, artistic truth may be referred to as "righteousness." This higher "righteousness" is very often established by deviation from historic truth. Let us remember, for example, the character of Napoleon in *War and Peace*; Tolstoy's depiction is artistically justified and "righteous," though it is not historic. True literature does not compete with history, nor does it reproduce the exact image of reality, but its illusion. Even literary chronicles based on historical facts, such as the great novels of Ivo Andric, are apocryphal flashes of history. Literature, respecting history, writes a story of its own time.

To make this story more convincing, writers use different techniques and different mirrors. The flat mirror, for example, reflects an object exactly but does not see far; it cannot bring closer what is distant, nor can it peek behind a hill; it cannot inflame a piece of paper nor cause a conflagration, as its myth-shaping brothers, convex, concave, or conic mirrors, can. They "revise" the image of an object according to their kind and capacity, without making it unrecognizable—what looms large they diminish; the small they expand—the distant and unseen they bring near; regular features they twist into masks; monsters they transfigure into graceful imps. These odd mirrors are the favorite instruments of modern literature. In a similar way, according to its laws, literature transforms the picture of historical events, uncovering their less visible or less known characteristics.

If all this is not a matter of controversy, let us ask how our time is reflected in contemporary poetry. The answer is not easy to give; there are so many poets, poetics, and traditions. Every master has his own master script. But, putting all differences aside, they all have something in common—the creation of verses and the pursuit of the poetic act itself. For a century now, poetry has been looking obsessively into its own image; it has been dealing with its own language and with its own artistic temptations; it has been taking the nature of poetry and the lot of the author as its principal problem. Caught in its own hermetic circle, it views the world from the inside, as something external, foreign, and threatening. The world is no longer a poet's home but his quarantine.

Poetry became lost in the endless lyrical space which Mallarmé opened to it. More and more, poets resemble alchemists or conspirators who communicate in an arcane tongue. Poetic teachings attract only the initiated, the specialists and fellow sufferers who spend their days in libraries and institutes or gather only for symposiums and congresses. The discreet but firm bond between poets and readers is almost cut off. Poetry's esoteric formulas and "healing" spells do not disturb the world; they put it to sleep instead. This lost communication cannot be explained only by the unintelligibility of poetic language. The misunderstanding is much deeper and relates, most of all, to what modern poetry is saying. Or, to put it better, to what it is not saying.

It has been assumed that the poetry speaks of something exceptional, something of crucial importance to every man. But for that to be true, poetic speech has to correspond with history and to discuss, in its own poetic way, the essential questions of its time. Modern poetry has been neglecting this task for too long and has been wandering in a circle instead—like the uroboros passionately biting its own tail.

In today's world there are famous poets still—embodiments of the watchful conscience of contemporary society; but if the nonliterary echo engendered by their humanitarian, libertarian, or propaganda actions were taken away, their number would be greatly reduced.

It is, of course, difficult to prove such an assertion; poetry never speaks with a single voice. A multitude of works of art strives to convince us of the opposite. Questioning itself, poetry at the same time poses questions about the destiny of the world.

One has also to keep in mind that "the hand of a writer is neither completely in his own power nor in the power of some blind passion; another Hand supports it and leads it across the paper so that, consciously or unconsciously, his work, merely by the way words in a sentence are strung together, serves as a testimony of time and space." According to this statement by Czeslaw Milosz, the text is a kind of a cardiogram; the poet is inexorably committed to a role of the witness of history. Literature, therefore, cannot be only a mere game of words. Such a conviction, beyond any doubt, reinforces the poetry of Milosz himself. But, were it only reduced to the hand's trace, to rhythm, to syntax, to contextual layer of meaning, and to the role of the

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"unconscious," such poetic testimony certainly would not generate the excitement that Milosz's poetry offers. And this is yet another proof that a poet has to deal with crucial moments in history, with what determines the "pulse" of a certain age. The value of his testimony and the value of the poetic work itself depend on that.

Therefore it seems necessary to think twice about Aristotle's advice. The consequence should not be, of course, a catalog of prescribed themes in which the building of a White Sea canal or the flight to the moon would be recommended as the Alexandrian feats of our age.

The poet is only partly a member of society; his speech is personal, and no one can prompt him as to what he should speak about. But his monologue is meant for others as well and, lacking response, becomes absurd. The reader must respond if art is to have any meaning at all. What today's reader should be told, I do not know; but it is certain that poetry should say much more than it does. Otherwise, the reader will become completely deaf to it.

You might not be aware of how the "Bop" was born. When a policeman hit a black on the head, his nightstick sang, "Be! Bop! Be-bop! Bop!" At least this is the explanation offered by Langston Hughes. Let it be, then, my own message to lovers and writers of verse: The stroke of this age upon our heads has to find its onomatopoeia in contemporary poetry.

THE NEW FREEDOM OF RHYME *by Peter Dale*

In the days of Latinate learning, there was an animus against rhyme which must have been a considerable nuisance in that heavily inflected language. In his *Observations on the Art of English Poesie* of 1602, the English poet and composer Campion remarked:

> The facility and popularity of Rime creates as many poets as a hot summer, flies.

Peter Dale has written seven volumes of poetry including The Storms, Mortal Fire, *and* Too Much of Water.

Milton agreed with him in disliking the jingle of like endings, though both men were consummate rhymers themselves.

In the days of our polyglot fragmentation of learning, the days of free verse and free love, there is among poets a similar impatience with the artifice of rhyme—and very little impatience with the artifice of eccentric typography. As a consequence, most pupils, students, and the casual general reader would say—some even complain—that modern poetry does not rhyme. For the facility and popularity of free verse creates as many "poets" as a hot summer, flies. In fact, these readers are mistaken, though not to blame, for while this has been one of the great periods of rhyme, it has been rhyme with a difference. Our period has been one of wide-ranging experiment with all sorts of extension to rhyme systems and technique.

It could be argued maliciously that while the moderns have only popularized one new form, free verse (which cannot be the one and only acceptable form for all areas of poetic communication), the rhymers have invented so many new systems of rhyme that all forms of verse have been virtually renewed and refreshed. It is no longer possible to complain that rhyme is a difficult straitjacket in English now that the poet has so extensive a choice of rhyme systems.

Traditional pure rhyme in English is based on a tripartite system: difference of initial sound, similarity of vowel, similarity of termination: *hill/still*. This is not true of monosyllabic rhymes that open or close with a vowel—but these will not materially alter our understanding. There is, therefore, a proportion of one of difference to two of similarity. (Emily Dickinson seems the first in America to change rhyme systems and alter this proportion, but she does not systemize her variations.) It is with this proportion that the earliest experimenters played.

In France, Jules Laforgue seems to have been the first to experiment with new methods. The mute *e* which is pronounced in French poetry suggested a type of pararhyme to him which is more familiar to us through the work of Wilfred Owen. Laforgue changed the last vowel pro-

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nounced but kept the consonant plus *e* to emphasize the change:

Non, non, ma pauvre cornemuse,
Ta complainte est pas si oiseuse;
Et Tout est bien une meprise,
Et l'on peut la trouver mauvaise . . .

(Poor bagpipes, the complaint you noise
Is not the tedium you suppose.
It's some contempt this Whole conveys
And you could find how bad it is.)*

The English version without the extra syllable is more difficult to hear.

Wilfred Owen developed pararhyme in which he shifted the difference of sound to the vowel. He may have derived this method from noticing an occasional license of traditional English verse such as Shelley's *"despair/appear"* rhyme in "Ozymandias." On the other hand, he may have developed it after hearing of experimenters in France such as Laforgue and Romains when he was out there. It is an effective rhyme, particularly for some of Owen's grim subject matter.

Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Naturally, an ear used to traditional rhyme has to acclimatize itself to these new sounds—which may account for common misapprehensions about rhyme and modern poets.

Owen's successors have only developed this system by widening the discrepancy of vowel sounds such as *loaves/lives*. Owen himself was forced to use what one might call close rather than pure pararhyme on occasion: *France/once* in the same poem "Futility."

Yeats made two changes in Owen's system—and if he learned from Owen disguised his debt by calling him a sandwich-board man of the revolution. Yeats dispensed with similarity of initial consonant so that his method could be called only final consonance, if one needed a name. He also discarded consistency, mixing the new rhymes like *spot/cut* with traditional pure rhyme and the old dodge of eye-rhymes. (He has been followed in this by many lesser poets and even a poet as substantial as Geoffrey Hill.)

While pararhyme was developing, the old pure rhyme was by no means defunct in hands such as Hardy's or Frost's. Eliot and a few others tried to develop it in new ways. Eliot wrote:

> Freed from its exacting task of supporting lame verse, it could be applied with greater effect where it is most needed. There are often passages in an unrhymed poem where rhyme is wanted for some special effect, for a sudden tightening up, for a cumulative insistence, or for an abrupt change of mood.

Thus we hear very effective occasional uses of it in his work:

And the ground *swell*, that is and was from the beginning
Clangs
The *bell*.

(Eliot also remarked that no verse was free to the man who wanted to do a good job. One wonders with what intent he allowed himself the phrase "for a sudden tightening up" in the first quotation.)

Eliot was followed, on the example of his minor poems, by the English religious poet Charles Williams in his Arthurian poems. American poets have also followed him in this usage. Jeffers will use rhyme to emphasize a point:

Those are the eyelids that never *close* . . .
The Eye.

And Jarrell, in his famous "Death of the Ball-turret Gunner" uses it to emphasize the aerial dogfight: I awoke to *black flak* and the *night*mare *fight*ers . . . Louis MacNeice was also experimenting by moving one rhyme into the line in a consistent rhyme scheme:

The sunlight on the *garden*
Hardens and grows cold. . . .

He also experimented with a system I first found in the Second World War poet Keith Douglas. I call it syllable rhyme because it involves rhyming the stressed syllable of a dissyllable and ignoring the light ending: *self*ish/*belf*ry. This system has the tremendous advantage of freeing traditional rhyme from stressed line-ends and allowing a subtler music of light endings. It is a technique also found in MacLeish's "Conquistador." The finest example is Auden's "Music Is International."

During the same period, Dylan Thomas devised a system of assonance rhyme, which is best illustrated in his poem "Fern Hill."

Now as I was young and easy under the apple *boughs* . . .
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple *towns* . . .

Again, this system changes the basic proportion so that there is only one similarity, but because it is the vowel it seems easier to detect.

More recent poets, including George Macbeth and myself in England, have followed Dylan Thomas but improved the proportion by matching the initial in rhymes such as *feast/feed*. Others have reversed Yeats's final consonance into initial consonance with systems like *l*eaves/*l*ance —but it is almost undetectable.

Pasternak used to complain of translations which ignored his method of rhyming. Something of it can now be sensed by non-Russian speakers like myself in versions of Andrei Navrozov whose own work has been strongly influenced by Pasternak's.

But time would grow old, and pass. And pliant,
Like ice, armchair silk would melt and swell,
First audible, you stumbled and grew quiet,
The dream grew silent like the echo of a bell.

The rhyme *pliant/quiet* looks at first like a simple syllable

Quoted from The Poems of Jules Laforgue, *translated by Peter Dale, by permission of Anvil Press Poetry (London)*

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rhyme, but notice how the light syllable echoes the indistinct but similar sound obscured by the *n* of *pliant*. Navrozov makes ebullient use of such things in his own work:

Geisha—gazelle or gypsy,
Quietly sad or sly?
Wild, like spring in Ipswich,
Sudden, like winter's flight?

The wildness of spring in Ipswich is nicely qualified by the "wild" rhyme.

I do not know how far Dylan Thomas' experiments duplicate or overlap Pasternak's, but he has a very interesting development of what I think of as vowel-chime, where one consonant is repeated in varied endings and the echo is reinforced by pararhyme:

Be your ghost pierced, his pointed ferule,
Brass and the bodiless image, on a stick of folly
Star-set at Jacob's angle,
Smoke hill and hophead's valley,
And the five-fathomed Hamlet on his father's coral,
Thrusting the tom-thumb vision up the iron
mile . . .

I'm sure someone could use the system for a real poem.

Whether from tinkering with syllabic verse *à la* French or from certain Gaelic influences, another system of rhyme is one that ignores equivalence of stress. Marianne Moore has many stray examples: *Ming*/some*thing* and, in modern pronunciation, de*fense*/experi*ence* from "Critics and Connoisseurs." Austin Clarke and Seamus Heaney also seem to use this type of rhyme, though no more systematically. Used systematically it can have a poignant effect:

And my hand, still dark to white on yours, though
wizened.
Enough now, was it ever enough to hold you,
this touch no words came close to in the end?
Love, leave the crazy tock of moth to window,
the lamplight's cone an auburn head shines
through.
Catch again the splendor of light in the wine-glow.

Again, it frees rhyme and meter from the necessity of endlessly stressed line-ends.

Another system may have come about from the influence of Gaelic or a systematizing of near rhymes traditionally used in tight spots. It is known as generic rhyme, which consists of matching consonants in families for rhyme according to their phonetic groupings. Examples from Gaelic—which I don't speak—may be: *bec/feit; faid/haig/chraib*. English groupings might be *river/thither/stiffer* or *bulb/pulp*.

There are many other new rhyme schemes of greater and lesser ingenuity which space forces me to omit. Yet I must mention one of the most complex uses of rhyme which Auden employed on occasion: assonating the rhymes of different pararhymes:

That night when joy began
Our narrowest veins to flush,
We waited for the flash
Of morning's levelled gun.

You have to be as skillful as an Auden to go very far with that.

I have a suspicion that Owen, a tireless experimenter, was moving towards a synthesis of these systems into what could only be called musical rhyme involving the modulation of one rhyme into another by assonantal or consonantal overlap. A hint of it shows in "Insensibility":

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched they are, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the helpless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

The *st* of *stuns/stones* is echoed in the mid-line *paucity* and its partner *simplicity* and caught up in *reciprocity*. It returns in the pararhyme *stars*, whereupon the final consonant becomes an echo in *shores* as *r(e)s* ends the last four pararhymes. There are signs that the poem was not finalized, but it seems the way Owen's mind was moving.

In this short article, I have listed about eight rhyme systems now available to poets, not counting the opportunity offered by this last one. It seems to me that poets now have the freedom to choose a rhyme system as they once chose a meter and that this freedom is a greater, more expressive one than the freedoms in what now passes for free verse. Indeed, they should continue the advances bequeathed them and refine some of these techniques. When one's ear is attuned to these things, it becomes clear that a poem may dictate its own rhyme scheme as it chooses its own meter. I will end with a poem that did so but refrain from further analysis:

It's baffling, every time I pass, this shifty sense
that you had known the place, that we were
intimates
of something here: a path; this now vestigial
track; which wildflower clump? what leafy fugitive
whose glimpse we'd made our own? But nothing
tangible . . .
What is this? The lane is gone wherever it
goes . . .
Never much of a one in my experience
for walks or views, why play the local genius
of diminutions? We never were unanimous;
what chance you'd keep omniscience to a picnic
spot?

—I get you echoing, your voice a little wearier:
"Moments we had, the days, our days, are
vanishing."

Look there! Ladies'-slippers. Will they satisfy?
Let them. I'll track them down again. I promise
you.

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STATE OF THE LITERARY ESSAY

by Thomas P. McDonnell

As a literary form, the essay was once thought to be doomed as the novel is said to be in its perennially announced demise. The familiar essay, in particular, brought to its classic perfection by Charles ("Elia") Lamb in the early 19th century, still finds some continuity today in our many personalized newspaper columns and even in the irreducible TV essays of—would you believe?—Andy Rooney. On a more substantial level, however, most contemporary essays are called articles. We are a pragmatic people, and we'd prefer not to be caught indulging anything as literary and useless as an essay; yet John McPhee's frequent contributions to *The New Yorker* are among the exemplary essays of our time. In an age dominated by the visual arts, we need—more than ever—people who can sit down and attempt to tell us what's to be made of it all.

The so-called literary essay has obviously failed to die on schedule. In fact, the literary essay is perhaps the chief staple we have in preserving the integrity of the language itself. Television, of course, is nearly *illiterate* in its slovenly use of the spoken word, and the careful listener can document this generalization almost at will. Also, there is the agreeable canard that the best use of English today may be found in the sports pages of our newspapers—a contention based mainly on the assumption that it is easily understood by people who move their lips when they read. On the contrary, the best expository writing in English today is to be found in periodicals that do not put an all but irrelevant value on both a sense of style and liveliness of interests.

Question: Why does the nonfictional prose of some of our most notable novelists often seem so much more attractive than their frequently dismal or severely disjointed narratives? John Updike is utterly boring—that is, as a novelist—but charming and even important as a writer of literary essays. You can have all but the earliest novels of Updike for one generous block of his essays like *Hugging the Shore* (1983). Is there really any good reason for reading the novels of Gore Vidal, for example, when you may have the delightfully outrageous wrongheadedness of the essays? It is curious, by the way, that poets generally write better prose than novelists and short-story writers and therefore make better essayists. Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Auden are notable in this regard.

Publishers still manage to survive the cost of producing books of literary essays. There are plenty of them coming out all the time. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has recently published Volume One of a projected series, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (1904-12), which will complement the equally formidable edition which comprises the *Letters* and *Diaries*. Virginia Woolf the essayist is preferable to the more notable and celebrated novelist. Despite the calculated nihilism she inherited from her father, Leslie Stephen, Woolf herself remains one of the great literary essayists in the language. Many of her best essays are still available in the two *Common Readers*, but nearly half the materials in the new series will be collected for the first time.

Oxford University Press has just brought out *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, edited by D.J. Conlon. Here, then, are the views of more than 50 essayists on perhaps the most prodigious essayist in English since Samuel Johnson and William Hazlitt. Among the contributors are such notables as George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis, V.S. Pritchett, Anthony Burgess, W.H. Auden, Malcolm Muggeridge, as well as Chesterton's great contemporaries Hilaire Belloc and, only slightly later, Ronald Knox. Perhaps the first thing you have to say about Chesterton is that so many of his books have stayed in print. Though his output was enormous (some 115 volumes), he practiced a trade, journalism, which does not ordinarily guarantee such longevity. And yet there is something very persistent in Chesterton. As an essayist, he had the knack of a clear and direct line of communication with the reader, whereas, curiously enough, Belloc's superior style and greater learning did not assure the latter a similar place in the number of books still in print.

The more formal literary essay is on display in Richard Poirier's latest, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (Random House), which may be placed in the middle ground, say, between the eternally politicizing *New York Review of Books* and the appalling turgidity of the Yale critics' school of deconstructionism. There's a touch of the tedious in Poirier too, but it is more a hindrance than a roadblock. The trouble with books like Poirier's is the insistence on a rigidly given theme to which all subsequent ideas must gravitate. In this case, it is the theme of Emersonian skepticism and its effect upon what Poirier calls—turgidly again—the "cultural-literary inheritance,"

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etc. Whatever they may be, it doesn't always work out in Poirier's equations. He will say rather haughtily, for example, that Emersonians have little or no interest in the novels of Catholic violence by Francois Mauriac, Graham Greene, and Flannery O'Connor. Moreover, he calls this "theatrical spirituality," without for a moment acknowledging Emerson's pathetic incapacity to recognize the presence of evil in the world. Poirier, of course, doesn't like the three writers he names any more than Emerson would, mainly because they are novelists who have perceived the element of transgression as a key component in the matter of our human drama itself. When, indeed, Poirier later praises Norman Mailer as one whose "writings are laced with Emersonian doctrines," the game is given completely away.

So it is time to put before the beleaguered reader the example *par excellence* of the civil, rational, and humane form of the literary essay in our time. I mean, in this particular instance, Guy Davenport's 20 new essays collected in *Every Force Evolves a Form* (North Point Press), which may be considered an extention of the 40 essays in *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981) issued by the same publisher. There is nothing wimpish about Davenport; he has strong opinions, to be sure, but on the whole they seem both eminently lucid and refreshingly sane. His writing is an antidote to the fashionable premise that nothing may be profound that has not first been made obscure. I don't know of a single academician today who would dare to write, for example, in praise of E.E. Cummings; but Davenport does it splendidly and without affectation. He is equally at home with the paintings of Henri Rousseau and the diary of Mary Boykin Chesnut. Davenport may be at his best as a writer of obiter dicta: Also,

> It is my opinion that *The New York Review of Books*, that bastion of gratuitous meanness, has done more to discourage good writing in the United States than the Litkontrol branch of the Politburo has in the Soviet Union.

> The settling of history's dust is always full of surprises: Emily Dickinson, John Clare, Melville.

> The universe is harmonic, or it wouldn't work.

> Every writer asks us to agree to a tacit understanding of how he understands the story he is telling us.

We have not had literary commentary like this since the late Randall Jarrell, and what makes Davenport all the more valuable to us is the keen awareness he has of historic principles and the continuity of the Christian tradition. And yet he manages to do this in a wholly unobtrusive but startling manner, as if tightrope walking with ease and confidence above the fetid morass of 20th-century nihilism. Also working in the humane tradition of the literary essay, however cynically, is V.S. Pritchett in books like the recent *A Man of Letters* (1985), in which he covers a wide range of interests in groups of British, American, and European writers.

Of singular interest in the field of the literary essay, in our time, is Joseph Brodsky's *Less Than One* (1986). One of Brodsky's merits is his interest in subjects that are not generally familiar to American and English readers. Why do we not know Osip Mandelstam better than we do, especially since we possess a wonderful account of the great Russian poet from his wife, Nadezhda? It is refreshing to note the enthusiasms of any literary essayist these days, but Brodsky himself takes the risk of excess in his long and revealing analysis of a well-known poem by W.H. Auden. But such excesses give life to the literary essay, even when they are the outrages that one may read in Anthony Burgess' *But Do Blondes Prefer Gentlemen?* (1986). In the end, a good essayist takes the intelligent reader into account as one who receives—and who may even accept—the strong and lively opinions of others. A real essayist does not ask us to agree with him but only to give him a friendly hearing.

NAME THAT TUNE *by Janet Scott Barlow*

First things first. In the briefly intersecting histories of rock and roll and Pentecostalism, it is recorded that Jerry Lee Lewis, at age 15, was expelled from Southwestern Bible Institute in Waxahachie, Texas, for unrepentantly playing a boogie version of "My God Is Real." In view of the depth and breadth of the Jim Bakker-PTL scandal, it seems only reasonable to ask: Should Southwestern Bible Institute reconsider its decision?

PTL. The letters have become almost as much a part of the cultural alphabet as CBS and ABC (or IRS and FBI). Their familiarity grew along with the scandal, a scandal that provided irresistible media fodder, news from all directions, something for everybody. The story had sex, money, and power; and we were given the details, the numbers, and the standings.

The only thing we didn't get is what the story had most of. Religion. The reason we didn't get religion is that the people asking the questions—journalists—didn't speak the language of the people with the answers; and the people with the answers—like Jerry Falwell—knew enough not to do any helpful interpreting unless it served their purpose. The evangelical appraisal of sin against God was as relevant to this particular story as the legal question of fraud in God's name. The media responded to this confusing situation by shoving everything under the all-purpose label of "Gospelgate." Once they learned the difference between a Fundamentalist and a Pentecostal, journalists more or less called it

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quits. (They had a harder time with the distinction between a Pentecostal and a "charismatic" and usually just grabbed whichever term came to mind first.)

What was missing in the reporting on PTL was relative perspective. Context. The necessity to place a question and expect an answer within a given context—are we in the Fundamentalist's mentality here, or "the world's"?—was something journalists couldn't, or wouldn't, grasp. As often as not, their ignorance appeared deliberate, a kind of left-handed requirement of "journalistic objectivity" regarding religion. After all, the Fundamentalist's mentality centers on "the evidence of things not seen." And "news" by definition excludes the evidence of things not seen.

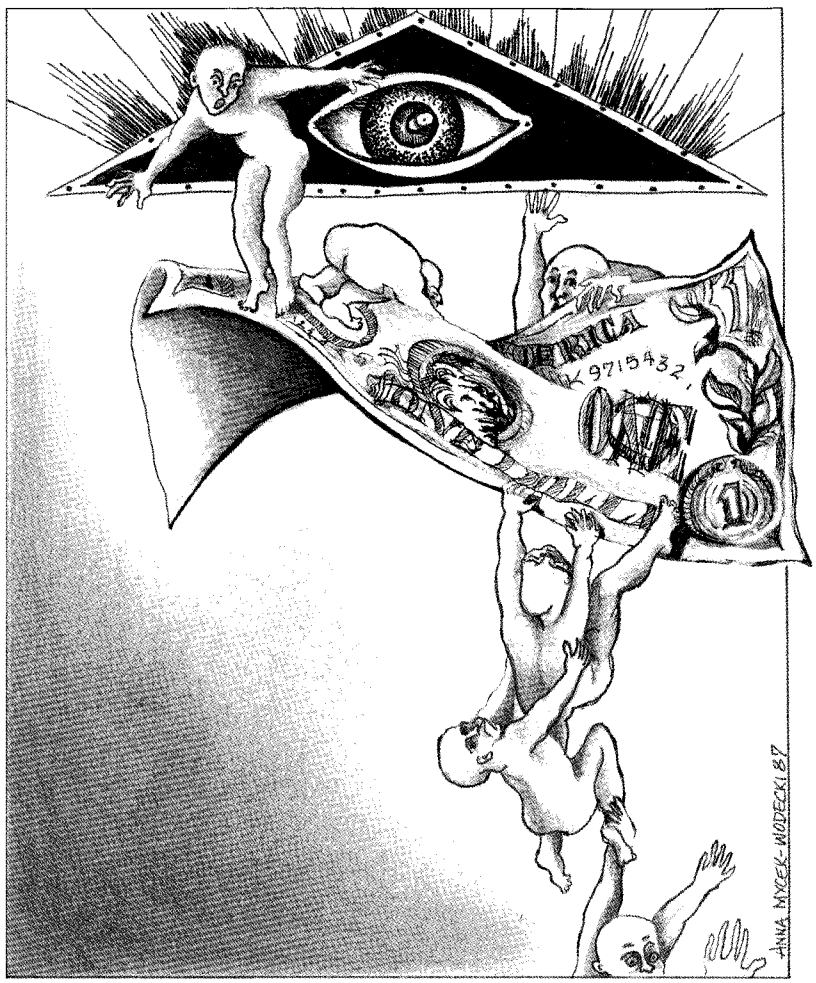
The fascinating upshot of all this objectivity-by-default was that Jerry Falwell, a man supposedly on the hotseat, got one of the longest free rides in media history. Moving in and out of context at will—a promise of "openness" here, a biblical defense there—Jerry Falwell finessed every reporter he talked to. And he talked, it seemed, to every reporter there is. But his skill—and his luck—didn't stop there. He maneuvered even within context, using Scripture both to define Jim Bakker's sin and disavow "judgment" on it, to threaten Jim Bakker and "forgive" him.

Within the religious story that didn't get reported were the religious questions that didn't get asked: Reverend Falwell, in the case of Jim Bakker, are born-again Christians to follow the biblical directive to "judge not, that ye be not judged," or are they to "reprove" the "unfruitful works of darkness"? Both? How? And how does one "restore" the brother one is working overtime to keep at bay? Jerry Falwell has answers. And the people with the most at stake in the matter—Fundamentalists of all denominations—would have found his answers instructive, in one way or another (which is why, given his current role, Jerry Falwell probably was relieved not to be asked). Everybody else might have found the answers interesting.

Instead, we got Larry King, with his hey-I'm-just-a-regular-guy style, calling Jerry Falwell "Jer" and James Robison "Jim." (Jer never flinched. But Jim—who is called James—looked half startled, half peeved and demanded to know, "Are you talking to me?") When all else failed, Lar just slapped his forehead and said, "What's goin' *on* here?"

Well, what *was* going on here? Plenty was going on, and not just in Charlotte or Palm Springs or Lynchburg. As the PTL revelations mounted and the cast of characters grew, the editorial commentaries began appearing—the analyses, the overviews. Most of these reflected the corrosive attitude that *on its face* a betrayal of public trust is nothing; it counts as disheartening only if one is a member of the public in question and has personally proffered the trust. If not, let cynicism and glibness prevail: The weasels are everywhere, and the suckers abound. It was an attitude from which emerged expressions of class hatred and religious bigotry, along with extremely selective questions about the market system.

Writing in *The New Republic*, Henry Fairlie got himself so worked up that he finally claimed Fundamentalism contains "no theology" and therefore cannot be "religion." His proof? Fundamentalism's crude insistence on "personal faith" and a "personal reading" of the Bible, both of which ignore "established and authoritative interpretation." This is an interesting, if predictable, approach to the pesky guarantee of "free exercise" of religion. If you don't *really* have a religion, well . . . And what qualifies as a religion? Apparently, it's whatever belief Henry Fairlie decides is



theologically sufficient to pass his test of "established and authoritative interpretation." (And just to keep things interesting, there is the fact that Fundamentalists themselves use the weapon of "established and authoritative interpretation" to challenge religious beliefs *they* oppose, like Mormonism. At the moment, however, the Mormons, the Fundamentalists, and Henry Fairlie are all still in business—and who says America doesn't work?)

Mr. Fairlie also offered what is by now the standard characterization of TV evangelism's followers: "the vulnerable, the anxious, the largely ignorant, the lost, the afraid, and the all too often poor." It is possible this characterization is accurate. It's also possible that every person on earth, with the exception of Henry Fairlie, has suffered at least one of these conditions from time to time. In any case, how would Henry Fairlie know? This obviously is not the kind of crowd he hangs out with—he being "a European" reared on a Bible that "had been strengthened by centuries of interpretation by many of the best and most devout minds in Western civilization." Gosh.

Mr. Fairlie's parting instruction was that we are to count all TV evangelists "among the servants of Mammon."

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Always, it comes down to money. Actually, it comes down to an objection to the very idea of money, carefully disguised as an objection to "greed." Since the PTL chaos started, some critics of television evangelists have done everything but come right out and say it: *How is it that those loony bumpkins get millions of dollars and smart people like us don't?* The answer *has* to be that they are "servants of Mammon" and that their followers are ignorant dupes of the servants of Mammon.

In fact, TV evangelism is a perfect working example of the economic principle of "perceived value" (not to be confused with the idea that there's a sucker born every minute). The principle turns on a simple question: Do the people letting go of the money believe they're getting their money's worth? That is, do *they* believe they're getting *their* money's worth? (One is cautious with this principle. It can be misappropriated as a defense of relative moral values. Its actual function is merely to explain the success of such stuff as good rock and roll and bad rock and roll, pet rocks, and $120 Gucci pens. And TV preachers.

There is no law against a widow (to use the preferred example) giving her rent money to Jim Bakker's ministry. There are, of course—need it be said?—legal and ethical limits on what Jim Bakker, as a minister, can do with the money. But there are no limits on the widow's own interpretation of her action; there is no one with the wisdom or the prerogative to perceive on her behalf the value of her decision. And the fact is, even after all the investigative and regulatory agencies have had their welcome and proper say about Jim Bakker's financial free-for-all, the perceived value of his ministry, past or future, is left to the determination of the ministry's supporters.

That reality is beginning to sink in on the critics of religious television, and their pained awareness of it is leading them into dangerous territory. Stirring beneath the outrage is the implication, the hint, that the real issue isn't the public accountability or fiduciary responsibility or use of the public airwaves or even tax exemption—ways to prevent evangelists from *getting* money; the real issue is simply to stop people from *giving* money—an elemental solution that not only puts an immediate end to religious frauds (i.e., all TV preachers) but also protects the poor and the ignorant from their own misguided perception of value. The poor and the ignorant, we are told time and again, have *rights*. Agreed. And for the time being at least, they have the right, just like the wealthy and the educated, to do with their legally acquired money whatever they legally choose. (Opponents of TV evangelism have so far been unable to rationalize the existence of what might be termed "the rich and the ignorant"; for instance, the wealthy dog-track owner who responded to Oral Roberts' latest message from God with a million-dollar check. Is *he* being victimized? If so, is it because he's ignorant? If not, why?—because he's rich?)

The PTL saga might have ended there, a story that began with Jim Bakker's excesses, moved on through Jerry Falwell's PR dazzler, and wound up with yet another ideological manipulation of the idea of The Poor. But then Jim and Tammy Bakker went on *Nightline*. For an hour. To explain things. And we moved into another realm altogether.

Ted Koppel, described endlessly as "tough but fair," began the interview by asking the Bakkers if they were going to "wrap [themselves] in the Bible" at every opportunity. The question was tough; the question was fair. It was also, considering who he was talking to and why, sort of . . . dumb. What did he think they were going to wrap themselves in—the IRS statutes? In any event, it was the last question of the interview that mattered, the last time in the whole PTL mess that relative perspective would be a factor. From that point on, Jim and Tammy Bakker were a context unto themselves.

Revelations about the Bakkers' Christian stewardship had centered on personal spending so unrestrained it seemed less a case of corruption than addiction, and business practices so irresponsible they seemed less self-serving than suicidal. Now, here was Tammy Bakker, vibrating tension as always, defending her shopping "hobby" with a crazy-perky "But I'm a bargain hunter!"

And here was Jim Bakker, ethically stunted, childlike in the worst sense. He sounded like nothing so much as the manipulatively charming youngster who's got himself cornered, saying, in effect, I know I made a mistake, but somebody else made me do it, and anyway, I'll never do it again, *honest*, and if you don't believe me you can watch me, and I'll even remind you to watch me, *really*. Together, the Bakkers were a contest of negative possibilities. Which was worse: that they actually believed what they were saying, or that they were intentionally blowing smoke? That they didn't know any better, or that they did?

Before the hour was over, however, Jim Bakker righted himself, he found his direction, he rallied. He mentioned his hope for a new ministry, something called Hurting House. He talked of his "dream" of going back on television. And he asked—several times—that "the people" write to him, that they let him know what they think, "how they feel." The ultimate test of perceived value.

And proof that what goes 'round comes 'round: Almost 40 years after an inveterate rock and roller was kicked out of Bible college for putting boogie licks to "My God Is Real," an incurable TV preacher was doing a gospel version of "Got My Mojo Working."

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National Liberation Literature *by F.W. Brownlow*

"The Devil understands Welsh."

—Shakespeare

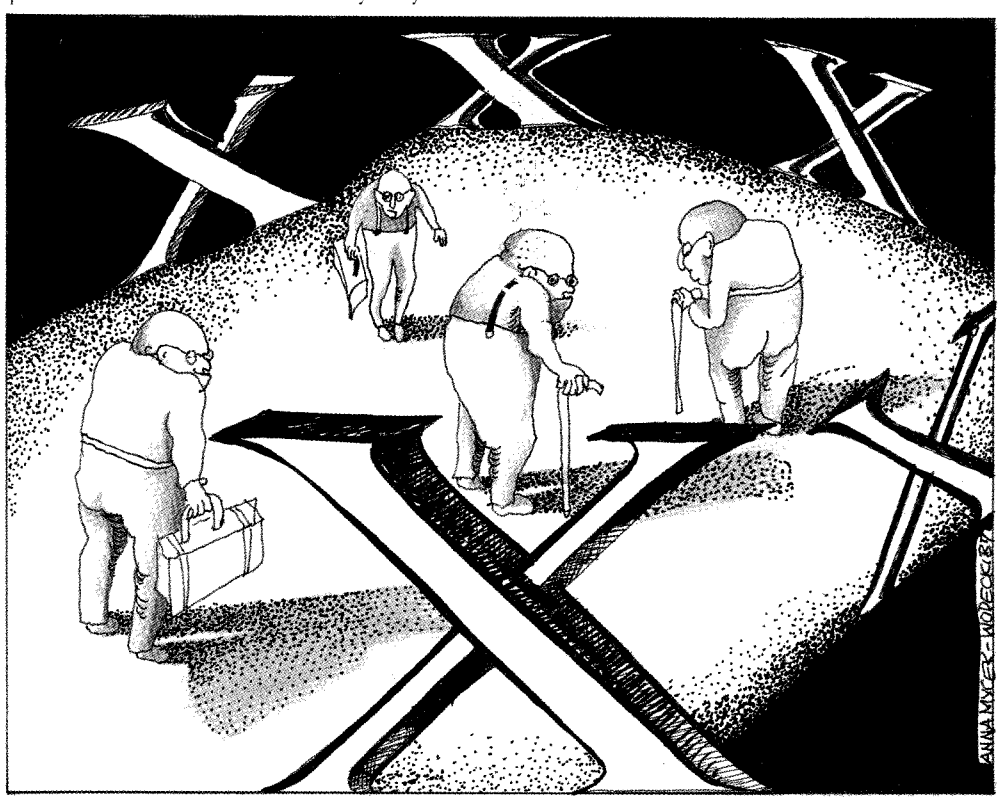
The Old Devils by Kingsley Amis, New York: Summit; $17.95.

Years ago, in the North Welsh town of Llanrwst, I bought a copy of Dylan Thomas' *Collected Poems*, and a 50-year-old Welshman present, a Baptist, teetotalling, nonsmoking, nondancing insurance agent, said, "A wonderful boy and a great poet: a terrible loss to Wales." It was the first time I had heard literary judgment pronounced on a basis of shared nationality, and by someone who doubtless had never read a word of the writer in question. A few years later, an Irishman who had treated me to several orations on the beauty and wisdom of Ireland and its people slipped me a copy of O'Casey's *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well* as I was leaving his house and cut short my thanks with, "I don't want it around the house for the girls to read." Ironically, if ever there was a professional Irishman, it was O'Casey. It was also true that he offered a different view of Ireland from the one "the girls" were getting at St. Dominic's.

At the time, these grotesque incidents revealed an approach common enough on the margins of literacy which has since become orthodox in more central places. Whether writers can actually write tends to be less important than their claim to represent some group allegiance or other. Literary criticism is moribund, being regarded as unpleasantly demanding, intimidating, and élitist. Few things have made this clearer in recent years than the behavior of the Episcopal Church, always a sure guide to conventional attitudes. When its grandees decided to have Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* rewritten in freshman English, and went on to treat resulting criticism as evidence of an incapacity for life in the modern world, they were acting on the well-founded presumption that they had nothing to fear from literary criticism.

Nonliterary judgments, however conventional, cut no ice with Kingsley Amis. His 16th novel, *The Old Devils*, presents a quartet of South Welsh sexagenarians and their wives as a case history of the havoc wrought by the notion that some things are more important about books than the way they are written. Amis' characters have messed up their lives, more or less, not because the Welsh are more foolish or vicious than other people, but because they belong to a society that, having accepted the idea that there is some special virtue in Welshness, has created a body of myth that makes it nearly impossible for a Welshman to tell the truth about anything. As one of the characters says, "Somehow or other it's impossible to be honest in [Wales]."

Early on in the book, Alun—writer, TV personality, professional Welshman—is returning to Wales to live. The train steward recognizes him, and tells him, "Everybody is delighted to learn that you and Mrs. Weaver have determined to come and live among us here in Wales. Proud too. Honoured." Alun talks in the



F.W. Brownlow is professor of English at Mount Holyoke College.

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same strain to a radio interviewer on the station: " . . . Heart is where the home is, and the heart of a Welshman . . . " Where did this kind of talk, which another character calls "pissartistry," originate? It makes very little sense: To call Wales "land of river and hill," as Alun does, is not to differentiate it sharply from any other place. The Scots in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* have a touch of it, but its development into a universal habit is more recent. Publicists and advertisers may earn large sums for it, but they did not invent it. Writers must have done that.

This is why the focus of Amis' theme is the life and work of fictional Welsh poet Brydan (1913-60), who lived at the end of his life in Birdarthur, a small Welsh seaside town, now the center of a fair-sized culture and tourist industry. Brydan's best known work is something called *Tales From the Undergrowth*, based on local characters whom he treated, according to Charlie Norris, a retired alcoholic caterer, as "quaint objects in a souvenir shop." He also had a passion for Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey, not mentioned in the official literature, but apparently no great secret. Put the details together, and thoughts of Dylan Thomas are inevitable. Although Amis denies referring to real people and places, no one who knows the broad outline of Thomas' life, *Under Milk Wood*, and the countryside around Swansea and the Gower peninsula will really believe him. In fact, most of the novel's best comedy emanates from the running mockery of the Thomas legend. There is an unveiling of a £98,000 monument to Brydan at the deconsecrated church of St. Dogmael's ("Well, it hasn't got any holes in it") that, for old Amis readers, will bring back memories of Jim Dixon's sufferings at his professor's madrigal parties. The novel's climax, too, happens in Birdarthur, brought on by conversations at Brydan's grave and in his old pub.

Amis has always been as much a satirist as a novelist. Probably more interested in the object of attack than in the aesthetics of the novel, he leaves the form pretty much as he found it. His favorite objects are pretension and hypocrisy, and he has a mimic's ear for the sounds they make. In *Lucky Jim*, Bertrand Welsh, snob and bully, infuriated Jim Dixon by saying "you sam" and "hostelram" instead of "you see" and "hostelry," while in *I Want It Now*, there is a Southerner whose "I can't stand it" comes out as "Arcane standard." In *The Old Devils*, Amis has picked up the habit of a certain kind of Welshman who, unable to speak Welsh, sprinkles his speech with a few common words to give the impression he can. Alun, "the second-rate bloody ersatz Brydan," as Tarc Jones, landlord of The Bible pub calls him, does this, especially when talking to his wife, to whom he lies a lot. This is a sign that Alun's otherwise rather genial charlatanism is really offensive. He can be trusted in nothing. At the book's end, when Peter Thomas' son rather carelessly condemns Alun, and Peter says, "I suppose so. The longer I go on the harder it gets to say that about anybody. . . . Of course he did leave a certain amount to be desired in the way of friendship, Alun," Peter's measured charity condemns more severely.

For despite all the knockabout fun ("They went outside and stood where a sign used to say Taxi and now said Taxi/*Tacsi* for the benefit of Welsh people who had never seen a letter X before"), this is a serious, sometimes rather harrowing book about aging people caught in a set of lies that have shaped their lives. As is often the pattern in an Amis novel, the young people escape to a different life, but the old have to put up with the people they have become. Amis' attack on ethnic and national sentimentality as a real moral killer seems to be perfectly serious.

It would surely be a mistake, however, to think that this is an anti-Welsh book or that the thing it attacks is peculiar to Wales. Because Amis really knows and likes Wales he can diagnose the disease in its Welsh form very effectively, the implication being that no country and few institutions are free from it. Like the alcohol drunk in such extraordinary quantities in his book, a little ethnic and national pride, Amis says, seems at first to do nothing but good, enhancing self-esteem and so forth—but only, says Amis, by suppressing reason and common sense. Taken in large doses, it can be fatal.

The Old Devils has an interesting sub- or counter-theme, too. American readers with a taste for satire will enjoy the guying of the Thomas legend, but if they pick up the metaphorical tendency of the story, they will notice something else: If nationalism is like alcohol, then like alcohol it is a substitute for something else—and that something else is religion. Amis once wrote an essay about the shortcomings of the modern church; one does not have to be particularly religious to detect the church's failures of faith, intelligence, taste, and morality, and to expect ensuing severe social consequences. In this novel, besides the church of St. Dogmael's, deconsecrated into an art center, there is St. Paul's, turned into a sex cinema, replete with the memories of its last vicar, the fornicating Joe Craddock. The clearest delineation of a standard underlying Amis' satire, however, is a description, certainly evocative, of the locked-up, deserted little church of St. Mary, occupying a remote promontory, and last used in 1959:

> "It's still a church," said Malcolm, having let the matter rest for quite a long time. "That's to say it hasn't been deconsecrated. . . . At the moment it's too far for anybody to come, you see. Too far by car, that is. How many years would it be since it wasn't too far to come on foot, with that climb for most of them to face after? Eighty-four in congregation the nave held, according to what I read."

Too far, indeed. Yet even if deconsecration is the only thing the modern church does with conviction, people have a way of taking things into their own hands. At the end of the book, Charlie Norris, whose fear and alcoholism seem proportionate to his efforts at truth-telling, sings again at the wedding of his friends' children. At the same ceremony, Peter Thomas takes the first steps toward putting what is left of his life in order. It would be hard to say whether Amis intends these very small, personal victories to have a religious overtone to them. Nonetheless, given the religious theme running through the book, even the title acquires another dimension.

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Greek Jive *by Peter Laurie*

"He fell with a thud to the ground and his armor clattered around him."

—Homer

War Music: An Account of Books 16-19 of Homer's Iliad by Christopher Logue, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $12.95.

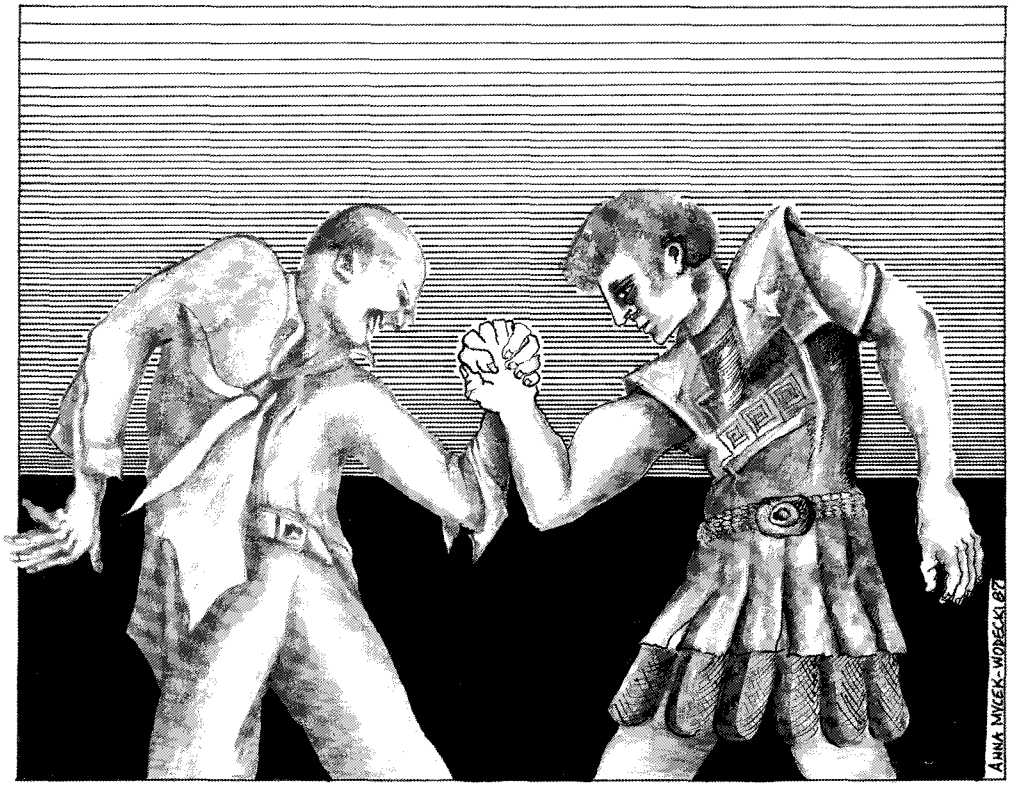
War Music, called by its author, Christopher Logue, an "account" of four books of the *Iliad* of Homer, is not a minor event. Its reception both in its native England, and now here, has been enthusiastic. For, English writing, especially in verse, may not generally be said to have overcome its mortal challenge from the likes of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound, either to assimilate or displace, and Mr. Logue looks, at least here, like he means business. It is fair to say that—compared with the virtual armies of English-speaking poets of both sexes around the world who have developed drab ways of saying less than nothing but no will to stop saying it—Logue *looms*. He has a voice, he has technique, his audacity is immense, and he manages to say something.

Yet, it was impolitic on his part to label what he has done even an *account*—a maneuver intended to get him off the hook as a *translator* (mere or otherwise)—as *War Music* must simply be judged a new work. Now, I (for one) tend to like this sort of thing. Twenty-five years of rereading have not yet dimmed the luster of Pound's audacities with respect to Li Tai Po and Propertius, precursors to what Logue does here. But more than to Pound, Logue has apprenticed himself to the Chaucer and Shakespeare of *Troilus* (who both derive not so much from Homer as from the medievally extant "account" of Troy attributed to one Diktys, "of Crete," a self-claimed eyewitness)—and even more than to any of these, to the Marlow of *Tamburlane*, *Edward II*, and *Faustus*. And, alas, more than to even these, to the whole modern medley of movies, TV, causes, tics, and ads.

If *War Music* must be denied its almost universal accorded encomium of authenticity with respect to Homer (and it must, for reasons I hope to touch upon, however briefly), nevertheless it remains all too true to this time. Mr. Logue and his well-wishers may feel this is all to the good, that they are satirizing modern life. If it were only that simple. Not knowing any more about Mr. Logue than this one volume tells me, I find his purposes murky, twisted, and self-defeating. But in the long war of the fashionable intelligentsia of the West against the West, this volume is a monument no serious reader can afford not to take seriously.

They call it Deconstruction, and it infests our higher life, using our universities as a base and oozing bogus revolution, conformism, pseudopacifism, revisionism, inversion, and incompetence, dedicated to convincing the immature and the unformed there is something better beyond the limits of traditional civilizations that traditional restraints (called "hypocrisies") are blocking everyone's way to, everyone's *right* to. So the past is not taught but "tried" in the light of our superior understandings. The victims end by convicting not the past but their own soul—of revolting nullity. For there is, of course, something "beyond" civility, only it's called savagery. In this race, I fear Achilles will never catch up with Mr. Logue.

Item: the willful transformation of Achilles and Patroclus into overt and active lovers—as Aeschylus did in the *Myrmidons*. The shrewd assumption is that for close on three millennia Homer has been hiding something only our superior powers of sleuthhood have found out. Unconsidered are the thousands upon thousands of living, ungay buddies who became and stayed fast friends from having withstood a barrage or taken a machine-gun nest side by side, or the physical demonstrations of affection among, specifically, Mediterranean men (even Mafiosi) who have never



Peter Laurie is a poet and scholar whose work has appeared in Poetry, St. Andrews Review, *and* The Harvard Advocate.

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gotten it on. Moreover, Pythagoras, a source of ultimate authority who stands in the direct line of Homeric transmission (as a disciple of the Homerids, who passed the epic on orally), frequently cited just this relationship as an example of the higher philosophical dimensions of friendship because Achilles loved Patroclus as "another self." Let alone the mismotivation for Achilles' grudge that ensues: If Briseis and Patroclus were both in bed with him, it would have been a war of a different color. In the Embassy scene of Book Nine, Patroclus and Achilles bed down with separate concubines. It's implausible that the Homer who was frank about the one thing would hedge about the other. The Greeks were supreme authorities, it seems to me, on the subject of "greeking" (which Pythagoras forbade strictly as a form of blasphemy). The high place of the *Iliad* (and the *Odyssey*) in Pythagorean teaching is one major reason Homer (in Plato's words) educated Greece. This high place of poetry in Greek culture is also one indispensable reason Greece has continued to educate *us*.

Which leads to—item: an obtrusive degree of invertedly eroticized combat, torture, murder, and corpse-pawing, as if Logue were trying to assert something about homosexuality as the universal cause of war:

> 1) Half-naked men hacked
> slowly at each other
> As the Greeks eased back the
> Trojans.
> They stood close;
> Closer; thigh in thigh; mask
> twisted over iron mask
> Like kissing.
>
> 2) Achilles laved the flesh and
> pinned the wounds
> And dressed the yellow hair
> and spread
> Ointments from Thetis' cave
> on every mark
> Of what Patroclus was, and
> kissed his mouth
> And wet his face with tears,
> and kissed and kissed
> again . . .
>
> 3) Molo the Dancer from
> Cymatriax tugs
> At its penis as he squeaks:
> "Achilles' love!"

In setting out these three among dozens of such moments, gentle readers, it is not my purpose to take away what pleasure certain may find (*have*) in such passages, redolent of SS perverts, the pages of the *Satyricon*, and the interiors of certain private clubs, catering to sadomasochist imagination, in Mr. Logue's fair city (London) and elsewhere. I merely wish, in view of reviewers' misleading certitudes, to signal that such images are not the *Iliad*'s—or anything like the *Iliad*'s. Ditto:

> And over it all,
> As flies shift up and down a
> haemorrhage alive with ants,
> The captains in their iron
> masks drift past each other,
> Calling, calling, gathering light
> on their breastplates;
> So stained they think that they
> are friends
> And do not turn, do not salute,
> or else salute their enemies.

. . . which is, though not Homer, rather good, until:

> But we who are under the
> shields know
> Our enemy marches at the
> head of the column;
> And yet we march!
> The voice we obey is the voice
> of the enemy,
> Yet we obey!
> And he who is forever talking
> about enemies
> Is himself the enemy!

. . . which collapses the momentary illusion of an ancient war into the deafening contemporaneity of a party line.

Mr. Logue gives voice and drama to that same cultish clutch of unexamined ideological assumptions that continues to paralyze contemporary will: that war is so awful it must not happen; that by crafting it in all its horror, the poet effects a change in human consciousness so it *will* never happen (never mind how many times it has before); that even a pervasive willful distortion of the qualities and motives of violence in accordance with the promptings of a mind I can only find deeply disturbed can, given our present backdrop of accredited victims seeking their own empowerment through emotional blackmail, pass for something as dignified as love for all mankind and a will to peace. I guess that, after all, is what the young black spear-chucker on the cover is meant to mean? Yet we affront not the pacifism of saints, the real kind, that wills to die before it kills, but rather the Saint Lenin variety (plugging one's officer in the back)—the kind that brings its peace in total enslavement only when the last objecting man is dead. It brings to mind the apostles Burgess and Philby, all those brave Bloomsbury defenses of the Higher Buggery that blench before E.M. Forster's immortal testament: "I hope when the time comes when I shall have to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends, I shall have the guts to betray my country!" (That far-off ugly piercing sound is only Nietzsche cackling in his grave . . .)

For the revaluing of all values has now assuredly come into its awful own: that there is something almost universally admirable about self-proclaimed corruptions, that there is something correspondingly contemptible about any aspiration to traditional strengths of character, these latter reflexively stigmatized as "pretensions"—never virtues or ideals—whereas the former figure among the highest reaches of our latest version of honesty. If only Mr. Logue had thought himself back into Homer's world, he might have come upon those very higher dimensions of being that alone might save us from our present selves: proper standards of manliness, honor, perseverence, priorities, duties, the imperatives forward and back of one's line, the inspiration of eternal things, beauty and beatitude that must be earned in sorrows and in blood—that sort of thing.

Instead he chose to think their world forward:

> And as she laid the moonlit
> armour on the sand
> It chimed;
> And the sound that came
> from it
> Followed the light that came
> from it,
> Like sighing,
> Saying,
> *Made in Heaven.*

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This, the scene in which Thetis presents Achilles with new arms and armor, is so much in the atmosphere of a TV commercial it might as well be about *panty* shields. "Made in Heaven" might better read "Made in Hong Kong." Concourse with a divine, transcendant, permanent aspect of being —in which the heroes, their poet, his audience, all passionately *believe*—*we* can only relate to as cute kitsch.

Some of the battle scenes wouldn't make the grade in Classic Comics:

> And as the arrows start to
> splash, back off,
> Running towards the backslope,
> up, a cat
> Airborne a moment, one
> glance back: "Dear God,
> Their chariots will slice,"
> splash, "corpse," splash, splash,
> "In half" . . .

Hera comes off as a gun moll:

> " . . . If you stick
> *him, him,* and *him,* I promise
> you will get your Helen back."

Helen is out of a Frederick's of Hollywood catalog:

> And Helen walks beneath a
> burning tree.
> Over her nearest arm her olive
> stole;
> Beneath her see-through shift,
> her nudity;
> A gelded cupidon depletes her
> woe.

. . . and is, of course (though the cupidon, lifted from the second part of *The Waste Land*, is originally "gilded," not *gelded*), a castrating bitch, what else? Among many candidates, the fourth verse here may rank as the worst ever conceived by an English-speaking person not habitually employed in the greeting card industry.

Once, in Mr. Logue's fair city (where the blurb gives to understand he also writes for *film*), a kindly elderly man named Henry James contemplated the work of a brash younger man named H.G. Wells and remarked, as of journalism in general, on the great new science of beating the sense out of words. Since, we have entered into the matter more thoroughly and can now beat the sense out of *images* (the stuff of the imagination, no less) themselves. So this "account," which merely thrusts upon one of the world's greatest surviving epics—one sovereign poetic heirloom of the dawn of Western civilization—its own deviant projections, *does not even exist* except for our time's constructed capacity for the endless replication of solely man-made and man-manipulated images,

REVISIONS

Dante in Wyoming

The gap between serious and popular fiction seems to get wider every day. Increasingly we are confronted with two choices that can be boiled down to Sidney Sheldon or Donald Barthelme, neither of whom have ever had anything to say that could not be written on the back of a matchbook cover. The *serious* novel, with plot, characters, and a point, is harder and harder to find, especially if the reader is searching for the polish and intensity that was characteristic of modern French and American novelists at their best. One ambitious experiment, however, has just come our way, *Desert Light* by Chilton Williamson Jr. (New York: St. Martin's Press; $15.95).

A burnt-out New York lawyer moves to Wyoming to escape the burden of his past—a bad marriage and a successful defense of a client who sounds suspiciously like Jack Abbott. If hell means having to go through everything a second time, then Chuck Richardson must be a lost soul. Not only does his wife return to haunt him, but he even finds himself joining the prosecution on a case of brutal and pointless murder. As in a nightmare, Richardson switches sides to work for one of the defendants: Jenny, a runaway girl who has been the shared mistress of two degenerates without losing a certain spiritual vitality. In a way she is the proverbial Western heroine, the whore with a heart of gold.

The novel gets off to a slow start, and Chilton Williamson—a senior editor at *National Review*—sometimes seems more at home with description than dialogue. Still, it is a book hard to put down, partly because the mystery is not so much a case of who done it as whom can we believe. The themes are as old as Sophocles and Dante, and the book is set in a recognizably Dantean landscape. In Williamson's world there is much real evil and some good. Richardson himself is a decent pagan at the end of his rope, but what saves him in the end is also a mystery, the mystery of love and, yes, grace.

Desert Light is not a perfect book. It is, however, a good book—better than a first novel deserves to be. The prose is lean and muscular, with an understated eloquence that cannot be learned in the Northeast. The author has great descriptive power and so sure a hand with the details of plot that most readers will find themselves engrossed, even against their will. The final section —a trip back to Jenny's home to persuade her parents to testify—pulls everything together so suddenly that the reader is dropped, with an almost blinding awareness, through the trapdoor of the scaffolding.

The critics will probably not like *Desert Light* or its author. Andrew Lytle, in an advance notice, describes the hero as "an outlaw who rescues love from lust, justice from power." Hardly a popular theme, nowadays. But Williamson's novel will find its readers who like adventures with a point, and if Robinson Jeffers' *Medea* was once described as Euripides with the mind taken out, Williamson's *Desert Light* is like Zane Grey with the mind put in. (TF)

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images captured on film, stationary or moving, those hoaked-up pictures worth a thousand hoaked-up words, their "truth" a matter of who points the camera at what and why, validated by sales. It was not ever thus.

And if any ought to try to break the vicious cycle of this enslaving process wherein manufactured imagery gives birth to itself in logarithmic increase throughout every human mind (most atrociously the growing *child*'s mind) until it guarantees that even in one's deepest *dreams* (dreams, which Plato called the language of the soul and of eternity) one communes not with one's gods but the ubiquitous czars of trade—the poet should.

The epic poet prays to his muses, who are the daughters not of contrivance but of *memory*, to aid him in his projections of images of the real. His function is to sing what was, not make things up. Homer seems to have lived long after the events he describes with eyewitness precision, a precision so convincing it led Schliemann and Blegen to try to dig it all up, an enterprise of overwhelming success. Any discrepancies are merely plausible breakdowns in an oral transmission covering several centuries of transfer of the facts from bard to apprentice (the incorrect function of chariots, details of armament, the organization of the state, the so-called "wooden horse," probably an imaginary explanation for a misunderstood siege engine, and so on). The forms of fantasy we have come to call "creativity" counted for very little (though there is some) in the formation of that classical temper of which the *Iliad* is our oldest and perhaps best exemplar. Consequently, the personalities Homer ascribes to the various putative historical characters in his poem are highly likely to be the personalities each of them actually had. What the *poet* supplies is Keats's celebrated "negative capability": He allows each in turn to fill his imagination, have his sympathies, and speak through the formular epic language of tradition. There is nothing pretty about Homer's war, but at least wounds are only wounds, not occasions for gory fashion photography in verse. One fights over a dead hero's corpse not to provide neat crosscutting but so that it may have the dignity of ritual burial that alone allows rest to the immortal soul.

Certainly that black warrior on *War Music*'s cover looks like one to whom the original *Iliad* would make perfect sense. One hopes he never learns of the product his dignity has been pressed into making salable. (He looks like he would sure know what to do with Mr. Logue.)

> And,
> At a window of the closed
> stone capital,
> Helen wipes the sweat from
> under her big breasts.
> Aoi! . . . she is beautiful.
> But there is something foul
> about her, too.

This is the other of Mr. Logue's borderline porn flick fantasies about a Mycenaean queen reknowned as the most desirable woman of all time. Surely The Real Thing would have known what to do about one such, too. *I* imagine her flicking her sweat in this poet's voyeur eyes and drawing the curtain over the majesty and mystery of something arresting enough to be remembered by *real* poets forever.

Postmortem *by Joseph Schwartz*

"We would rather run ourselves down than not speak of ourselves at all."

—La Rochefoucauld

The Fifties: From Notebooks and Diaries of the Period **by Edmund Wilson, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25.00.**

Portrait of Delmore: Journals and Notes of Delmore Schwartz 1939-1959, **edited by Elizabeth Pollet, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $35.00.**

When the reputable and talented die, it is often their fate to have their privacy examined in detail. This is a mixed blessing at best. How chilling it is to remember that Nijinski's feet were cut open to see if the bones were somehow special. There must be some clue, we think, to the mystery of fame.

The Fifties, again edited by Leon Edel, is the fourth volume of Edmund Wilson's notebooks to be published, and the most tedious to date. It contains seemingly endless family data (six pages on the stealing of a Boston Rocker), gossip, comments on his relatives and his wife's relatives, various and sundry opinions, and (though now less so) the temperature of his sexual relations. I think it time to call a halt. Wilson himself edited, in part, *The Twenties*, about which he said that he didn't want to publish inferior material. His wish has not been heeded. At the beginning of this inflated enterprise, expectations were high. In a brief memoir in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Harry Levin said that he had thought the American counterpart of the Goncourts would be forthcoming but was saddened by what he found, even in *The Twenties*, the best of the lot. The 41 copybooks (some 2,000 manuscript pages), it appears, will not constitute an invaluable history of American literary and cultural life.

By the 50's Wilson had quit reading most new writers and concentrated on a number of personal projects of dubitable value. These projects were no longer concerned with literature and will prove to be of antiquarian interest only. What happened? Two things, I think.

First, as time went on, it became increasingly clear that he had no compelling image or idea in his life, not

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even a strongly held philosophical point of view—except to have none. He was left at the mercy of his ego, one more instance of the bankruptcy of modernism. And while he was an uncompromisingly professional writer, what did he have, then, to be uncompromising about? Honesty to his own taste, which is not a little thing in our era, but not ever much of a big thing. Even his vaunted hard realism is called into question by the IRS affair. Is it possible that a former editor of *The New Republic* would forget to pay his taxes for nine years and be surprised to discover that taxes were used to pay for national defense?

What is the nature of his legacy? At best, he provided an example of what a determined reader and an excellent writer can do for our understanding of literature by using the historical/biographical bias. Many of his fine essays still remain (and will for some time) as points of reference. But he never did understand the world's inviolate sadness, the tragic view of life.

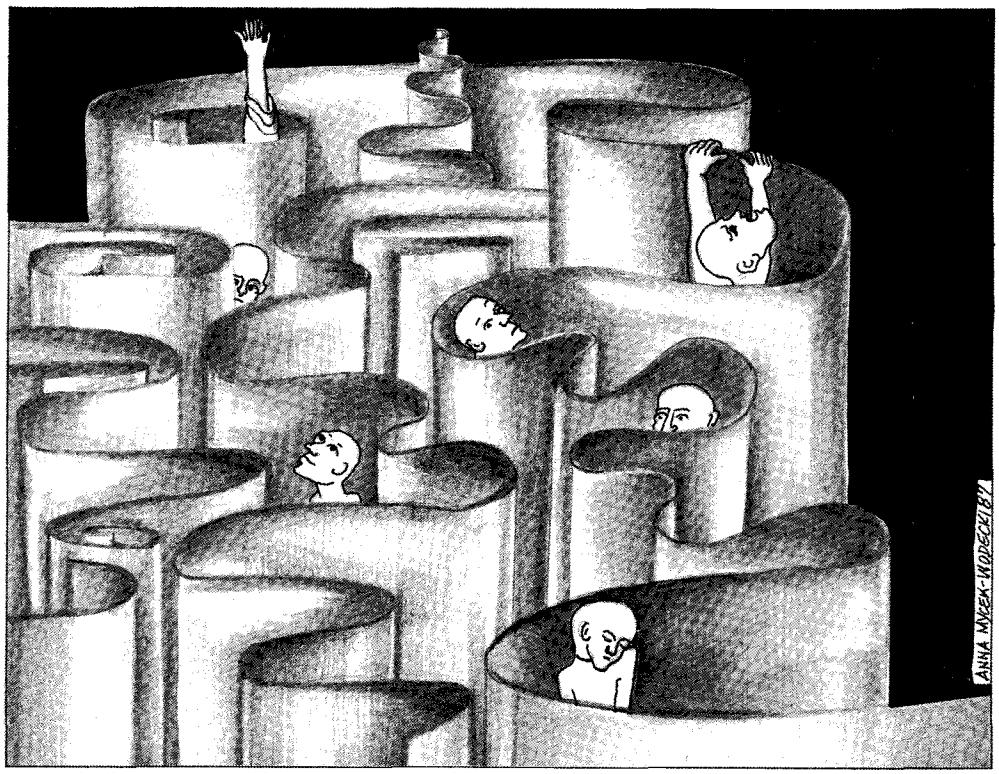
Second, he played Johnson to himself playing Boswell. He wanted it both ways. He had cast himself in the role of Johnson, which gave him what his friends at once recognized as authority, even early on. But Boswell, he held, was the true creative genius, the role he wished to play as time went on. (Delmore Schwartz said that Wilson thought he was Henry James.) What he had not accomplished with his novels and plays, he was determined to pull off with his journals, which give us a portrait of Wilson watching Wilson watch himself in the mirror.

In *Portrait of Delmore: 1939-1959* we have a like phenomenon; the dust jacket features a posed photograph of Schwartz looking at himself in the mirror. He was from first to last the hero of his own life. The journals contain notations, single words, and sentences highlighted by their isolation, fragments of poems, stories, and essays, notes to himself, dreams, dates, lists, social calendars, records of his drinking and pills taken, much nonsense, and in boldface a self studying a self. Near the beginning he notes that all great men are insane and at the ending he is haunted by fears of madness. One is strongly tempted to see in him what his early commentators saw in Hart Crane—a symbol of what America does to its poets. There are no second acts; romantics do not survive the assault of experience. But both Crane and Schwartz knew better. In their lucid moments both knew how inner the destructive urge was.

Delmore Schwartz was reputable and talented. Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* is a memorial to him. Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* has a poem to him. John Berryman devoted 10 elegiac Dream Songs to him, "the young man/Alive with surplus love." Karl Shapiro named him the "touchstone" of his generation of confessional poets. Publishers have served him well: Everything he wrote has been put into print. Yet, he is not much read now; many find his life, as symbolic, more interesting than his work. Somewhat reluctantly (remembering poor Nijinsky), I will engage in a postmortem and confront the question Schwartz himself asked about Ring Lardner, "why so successful and gifted a human being suffered so much and so helplessly."

Although he knew that "the absolute will of the ego" must be subjected to the testing of reality, he could/would not do this seriously or for over a period of time. He was mature enough to know that doing "what you really want to do means that you are willing to take the responsibility for what you have done once it is done," but he could not act on this thought. Living directly as a pagan and with no sense of community, he could not engage himself in reality, true as he knew it was, when it stretched out its hands to him. "We are all forever/lost and/alone." History was most of the time, he felt, a nightmare which intruded on his special sense of self giving him an epic case of insomnia. One of his friends remarked (and he copied it in his notebook), "Delmore is selfish—he wants to be loved before he loves anyone."

He was a tragic paradox. On the one hand, his selfishness was huge and uncompromising. But on the other, more's the wonder, he never knew who he was. For whom was he making this incredible effort of will? Yet, despite this, he remained convinced for years that his life could be the base for an epic drama. "The self is a story." In reality, a sustained work about his own life was impossible. His most famous work, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," ends precisely where he, being born, would have to accept responsibility for himself. "I wished for the innocence of my stars and my stones and my trees," but seeing through the glass darkly he was shown instead "my



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fear at last" and in his own face. "Let the day perish that I was born."

W.H. Auden guessed that his egocentric mania, as he called it, was an essentially religious problem, caused by his desperate need for a transcendent Other and his inability/refusal to let go of the self. William Barrett, his closest friend, felt that Schwartz had an essentially religious nature, and many entries in the journals (as well as his poetry, essays, and fiction) support this judgment:

> God exists if anything exists.
>
> If you don't believe in God,
> there is nothing you won't do.
> Men who start with denying
> the existence of God will end
> by devouring each other.

Yet the passion for the transcendent and the thirst for community did not finally enable him to put his ego in order. It appears that he had so little sense of anything else that he clung harder and harder to the fragile self even as it dissolved in tears of self-pity. Paraphrasing Henri Montherlant, he wrote in the *Journals*, "O my God—cut the appalling knot of contradictions that at least for one instant before ceasing to be, I may at last know who I am." But no knot proves more Gordian than the one tied by oneself. In desperation, he concluded:

> We will never arrive
> At the future in
> Which we exist . . .

"No roots, no religion," he lamented. In the final entry he names the world "poisonous."

Two entries, late and probably shadowed by growing madness, stand isolated in the *Journals*, each in its turn, and between them they are the keys to understanding his yearning, his failure, his suffering, and his helplessness. "Call me" echoes his wild longing to be part of a reality larger than himself with forebears and heirs who reach out to embrace him into the truth, "but they are too far away." And then the ineffable "I can't."

Gemeinschaft Without Mussolini

by Andrew Oldenquist

"Modern society acknowledges no neighbor."
—Disraeli

Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture by John J. McDermott, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; $25.00.

The Tolerant Society: Freedom of Speech and Extremist Speech in America by Lee C. Bollinger, New York: Oxford University Press; $19.95.

Separate thinkers have often thought the same thoughts when the time was ripe. The same needs will be felt, or the same things will be perceived wrong by sociologists in California and philosophers in the Midwest. Perhaps this means our minds are so social that a sense of alienation, an inkling of disorder, a sag in the general quality of life sets off similar alarms in thinkers around the country. And *that* truth, if it is one, is a major element of the thought ripening now: We are social creatures who cannot flourish without traditions, common institutions, and each other. Contrary to what the existentialists say, we require social identities, while too much individualism makes us miserable and alienated. This is the New Communitarianism in American social thought, a theme of countless essays and at least a dozen books published in the past few years, including John McDermott's *Streams of Experience.*

This renewed appreciation of the "organic" nature of society can make conservatives find virtues in Marx—it is conservatives and not liberals who have recently talked loudly about our sociality, and protested if liberals claimed exclusive interest in the "community." Marx did have some funny, 19th-century economic ideas, but they can be politely ignored. The American left selects from another page of Marx's menu, their radical individualism keeping them suspicious of social identity. Retaining only those funny economic ideas, they create the phenomena of individualist and even libertarian Marxists. The liberal's fear is that "community" leads to the social black hole of a totalitarian block-state, while the conservative's fear is loss of community, communication, and being.

McDermott says, "In the 20th century, anyone who studies anything and is unaware of Marx is in a state of ignorance." He offers two "salient contentions" of Marx: "[F]irst, that institutions condition consciousness rather than the reverse; second, that our fundamental situation is to be in a state of alienation." There is, running through McDermott's thought and much of the American pragmatist tradition, a sense of the relatedness of things, of a social world in which

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people are not marbles rattling in a box. The American classic philosophers—Pierce, Royce, James, Santayana, Mead, Dewey—lived, after all, in the twilight of the Hegelian philosophical empire. But it is Hegel held at arm's length, for, like William James, McDermott believes that the relations between things are objective and "external"—he certainly does not hold that the Prussian (or Soviet or American) state is "mind on earth."

"Marx, Durkheim, Mead, Dewey, have it right. The self is a social construct," writes McDermott. He is a pragmatist who is more Hegelian than the classic American pragmatists, and sometimes he wants to be a flower in a crannied wall: "What, for example, could time do to us if every time we met a person, or thought a thought, or dreamt a dream, we involved every person ever met, every thought ever thought, and every dream ever dreamt?"

He praises pluralism, interrelatedness, transience, flux, tensions, and process; this is our "form of life" which is precious and unique—an offering we have to give ourselves and the world in the 21st century. But, McDermott sees it faltering:

> Put directly, the . . . originality of America is strapped to its belief in the sacredness of time, its celebration of journey and transiency, and its aversion to ideology, eschatology, and final solutions. The inversion of this order of priorities will sink us as a culture.

We are guilty, he says, of a failure of nerve and the ability to be true to ourselves.

McDermott swims effortlessly in American intellectual history and currents of thought. He speaks of the perpetual conflict between individualism and community, personified in James and Royce. He reminds us how good a philosopher Dewey can be, and how his Hegelian youth makes Dewey understand our social selves. Dewey, he says rightly, is the most sophisticated, honest, and imaginative of American social thinkers. Probably the reason John Dewey is not read in philosophy departments is because he is cited so much in education departments.

McDermott sees causes of our present social plight in World War II, Vietnam, and Watergate; but how can he cover the subject without mentioning blacks? He is devoted to classic American philosophers, from Pierce and Emerson through Dewey, but when he says what they have to tell contemporary America, he gets fuzzy. This may be because he has thought longer, harder, and better about Emerson, James, Royce, and Dewey than about the problems confronting present day America. Or, it may be because the philosophers themselves haven't as much to tell contemporary America as McDermott would like.

In his chapter on "Classical American Philosophy" McDermott tries again to relate his philosophers to American society. It is not easy. Except for Dewey, they were almost as distant and unconcerned about society as the linguistic analysts who followed them. While the positivists of the 30's and 40's had something new to say about science and philosophy, Anglo-American philosophers reached their nadir of irrelevance and preciousness in the 50's and 60's, when they were completely absorbed in the minute scholastic analyses of words and "concepts." A sizable segment of philosophers today carry on the tradition of the 50's and 60's, but a growing number are willing to dirty their hands with the empirical and talk about moral problems and public policy.

On the topic of education, McDermott asks for cultural literacy. According to him, the gap between rich and poor, more than between black and white, is what endangers the nation. His solution is to make the "historical dimension of every discipline an integral aspect" of education. Democritus is to be a part of the physics curriculum. After providing for basics, education is to concentrate on "autobiography/biography, botany and physiology, sculpture, and theater." This is, to say the least, quaint, given the terrible problems of slum schools. It does not sound like thinking of someone closely connected with the problems of the schools.

McDermott extends his organic conception to architecture and the body—the body, he thinks, is not a container in a world of boxes. We are not atoms in the void, bumping, permeable, diaphanous, interpenetrating. Yes, but even when what he says about society's problems sounds right, it is hard to find it in the philosophers, and when the philosophers are stating their main concerns it has little to do with society. McDermott thinks that the golden age of American philosophy understood American society and its problems better than the philosophers of today. The sad truth is that none of them, then or now, took the time as professional philosophers to really examine American institutions and social problems. Dewey comes closest.

Whereas *Streams of Experience* is panoramic, Lee Bollinger's *The Tolerant Society* is narrowly focused. It is a closely reasoned book which wonderingly examines our tolerance of extremist and intolerant speech that is clearly more dangerous than some behavior we unhesitatingly make illegal. Why is it that "[n]owhere else in life do we insist on such a level of self-restraint"?

Bollinger presents two models of free speech defense. According to the "classical model," free speech helps truth emerge and is essential for democracy. The classical model, Bollinger says, insufficiently recognizes that

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First Love

by P.J. Kavanagh

Clever, the way Satan
Points out I don't know
Whether is sounding now
Near pigeon, distant cow.

If I believe an horizon
Measured, awaits us,
He asks me how I can.
I think he thinks he is
A hard man.

But if the dream was you,
And if the dream untrue,
Look where it leads me to,
This almost infinite place!

If what is best in us
We muddle and disgrace,
What of a visitation,
Because not my possession,
Proof against poison?

Not a house, an horizon,
Never seen but believed in,
As I believe in you, a treasure—
That could be forgotten . . .

A different scale of measure
That leaves no need to know
Whether is sounding now—
Soft, persistent, low—
Near pigeon, distant cow.

"we suffer a serious loss when we strip ourselves of the use of legal restraints against speech behavior we regard as socially destructive." The "fortress model" maintains there is a constant threat to free speech and that we need to erect our legal barricades at some distance from the center.

Bollinger thinks it is right to let the American Nazis march through the Jewish neighborhood in Skokie, Illinois. His argument is psychological and complex. Toleration of genuinely offensive and dangerous speech, he contends, is a limited exercise in self-restraint that symbolizes our recognition of our more general impulse to intolerance. Toleration nurtures an ethic of self-restraint; it holds before us the intolerant mind we are to avoid in ourselves and reminds us that in each of us is a shadow of the Nazi mind.

He calls his view the "general tolerance theory" and sees its justification in "symbolically demonstrating a capacity for self-control" over intolerant feelings. It is like a religious fast. Bollinger seems to imply that if we were not sorely tempted by intolerance, such exercises in self-restraint would be unnecessary, and then it would be best to ban the Nazi march.

Bollinger offers Alexander Meiklejohn's appeal to "community" as a precursor of his argument. Meiklejohn sees tolerance as a way the community defines itself, just as punishing criminals is said to reinforce both the criminals' and the society's social identity. But Meiklejohn's argument can be used to yield the opposite conclusion. A community does affirm its identity by banning or punishing what strikes at its common good, as the Nazi march certainly did. Bollinger implies that the public values threatened by extremist speech have less need for community affirmation than has the value of toleration (because of its symbolic connection with toleration in general). But is this obvious? What of the symbolic connection of the Nazi contempt for Jews with contempt for anyone? And the fact that tolerating the disorder caused by the Nazi march is symbolic of tolerating disorder in general?

The toleration of extremist speech, for Bollinger, is essentially pedagogic and character-building. It is a walking-on-hot-coals theory of why we should tolerate marching Nazis and Ku Klux Klan rallies, "to test and develop a general character of mind through confrontation."

What, then, are the limits to extremist speech? He raises the question and discusses or mentions libel, obscenity, graffiti, *Little Black Sambo*, and feminist objections to pornography. He concludes that we withdraw tolerance when self-restraint is just too difficult to maintain. One expects a theory to supply a stronger way to draw a line—this is not an obvious outcome of his general tolerance theory.

The problem with graffiti, Bollinger says, is that it is done secretively, like an obscene phone call. But that may not be the right reason. The problem with graffiti is that tolerating it shows that society's moral self-confidence and self-respect have faltered. A city or subway system that tolerates graffiti is like a school that abandons its rituals and lets its appearance go to pot. Tolerating disorder and graffiti weaken our sense of community. Such magnanimity diminishes citizens' confidence in a public space in which the behavior of strangers is reasonably predictable and not frightening.

The general question, whether there is too much freedom in America, bears directly on graffiti, extremist speech, and obscenity. Tolerance is an important value, and Bollinger is as subtle and persuasive as any writer I know in taking free speech and tolerant character seriously. As he sees it, they require that we tolerate Nazi and Klan marches.

Is, on the other hand, the toleration of Nazi marches like the acceptance of graffiti and general disorder? Bollinger rightly claims that the usual utilitarian arguments fail to justify extremist speech, and he offers us subtler utilitarian arguments instead. But they are mere techniques—witnessing intolerance, testing oneself, reinforcing a tolerant character, etc.—which *assume* that a society as tolerant as he proposes is best. Bollinger doesn't show that the need for community and felt security is outweighed by the pedagogic benefits of tolerating people who preach the subhumanity of most of our species while hinting at violent means to achieve their ends.

Belonging to a community involves a proprietary sense toward it, an assumption of a social identity, and genuine sacrifices of freedom. There are points at which tolerance and the requirements of community clash, and it is in no way obvious that community must yield in the notorious cases Bollinger discusses. This moral controversy, as most others of importance, takes place on slippery ground: "If you ban the Nazis then you can ban the so-and-sos and then the Episcopalians." But the rational approach to slippery ground is not to refuse to enter it, thus remaining pinned at one of the two extremes, but to dig in our claws and stop when our judgment tells us we have gone as far as we should. At a certain point, taking rights seriously while disregarding the wrongs presents us with a slovenly and alienating society, where disorder, symbolic threats, and diminished expectations of civility tell us we have slid too far.

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Gimme That Ol' Time Education *by Carl C. Curtis*

". . . Form and Limit belong to the Good."

—C.S. Lewis

Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Towards a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures **by Peter McLaren, London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.**

God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School **by Alan Peshkin, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; $24.95.**

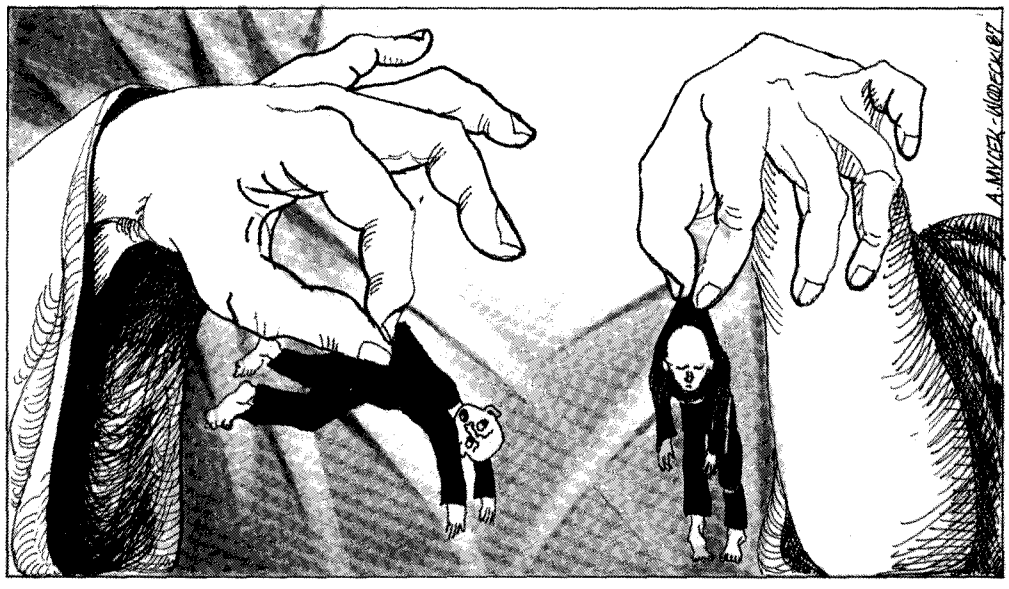
Liberals in the United States have lately gathered around the standard of pluralism in the hope of stalling the movement toward private Christian education. Yet Americans, historically indifferent to such objections, have been the last to censure a church—especially a reformed or an evangelical one—for its forays into schooling. Essentially we are a religious people. Our traditions, symbols, and character carry the stamp of the pulpiteer. Listen to almost any group of Americans conversing on a topic that requires taking sides (and, given the American character, few topics don't), and you will pick up first the high moral tone, second a trace of righteous anger, and finally the hammer of condemnation. When an American thinks he's right, he stands on the mountaintop with a thunderbolt in hand and challenges all comers. Such an attitude must perplex and irritate foreigners—notably Western Europeans—just as the lack of it in them galls us; yet an American without it would hardly seem worthy of the name.

We are all preachers at heart: The New Englander finds himself alternately haunted and inspired by images of the glorious City on the Hill; and the Southerner surely sees nothing strange in the offshoot of the Great Awakening, the revival. But whether we trace our origins to Plymouth Rock or Jamestown, we find the same thing: a group of men dedicated to serving God. And not just any God. Jefferson and Paine could talk all they wanted about Nature's God, but outside their small circle, men had much more definite ideas about who God was and what He expected. The God of the men who fought in the Revolution and ratified the Constitution was the God of Abraham and Paul, the God of the Bible, sharply defined as Savior and judge, and specific in His commandments. Behind this piety was always a sure reverence for the Word, divinely inspired and, in the minds of most men of the time, unambiguous.

Generations of young Americans were educated to revere the God of Scripture, to invoke Him in time of need, to fight for Him if necessary. It is no accident that Harvard and Yale were founded to promote the art of preaching, biblical exegesis, and missionary zeal; that Princeton once chose Jonathan Edwards to serve as its president; that Lincoln in his *Second Inaugural Address* invoked not the God of Nature but the God of the Bible; or that historian and statesman Albert Beveridge confidently declared before the U.S. Senate near 1900 that America was God's chosen nation. Such behavior was what Americans had come to expect of their leaders; they educated their children to insure they would act similarly.

To attempt to skirt the role of religion in the history of American education, as indeed many contemporary pedagogues are trying to do, is to remain ignorant of the central fact of our background. Yet this ignorance has come to dominate the community of intellectuals and pedagogues who have assigned themselves the task of interpreting and chronicling our country's past, as well as its relationship to the present and future. Their "pluralism" (translated in the extreme into nihilism) quite logically follows from their inability to accept the traditional American adherence to biblical precepts. For them, the American tradition is 20th-century secularism and relativism read into the past. The absolute limits of our worldly condition clearly delineated in the Christian doctrines of the Fall, damnation, and redemption—doctrines once carefully taught our young—are treated as foreign to the American genius.

That Christian schooling, as practiced by the evangelical and reformed communities in this country, is anathema in this community is shown in two recent additions to pedagogical research, Alan Peshkin's *God's Choice* and Peter McLaren's *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*. Though pursuing different purpose and theory, each author displays a frame of mind characteristically hostile to or perplexed by the revival of educational techniques



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that formerly served America.

Peter McLaren, a Canadian, addresses his work to the problems of lower-class Azorean students in a Catholic school in Toronto. It would seem, then, that *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* has little to do with the future of American education. Regarding the particulars of the book, this is correct. Theory, however, has no respect for borders; it is reasonable to suppose that McLaren would develop similar ideas and phobias in an American setting. Anyhow, McLaren clearly means to address his conclusions to the fraternity of Western educators in general and not merely to a restricted group.

Even though McLaren never explicitly proposes to debunk traditional Christian education, that is exactly what he ends up doing. In studying the treatment of Portuguese junior-high students in Toronto, he arrives at the not-too-novel conclusion that Catholic educators, wittingly or unwittingly, are engaged in bolstering an inherently evil capitalist society. How, one may ask, are they doing this? The answer will not surprise anyone, for it is as worn as McLaren's costive deconstructionist lingo. As instigators of an established classroom (and class) ritual, the teachers become agents of "class domination" resulting in the "reproduction of inequality." They are able to do this by equating model student behavior with model Catholic behavior. If a student is a good Catholic, he will work hard to prepare himself for a life working in a factory or driving a truck. Thus school and Church provide grist for the capitalist mill. In pursuing this line of reasoning, McLaren never calls religion the opiate of the people, but he might as well.

In constructing—or deconstructing—this insipid Marxist critique for nearly 300 pages, McLaren manages one good point. He rightly asserts that educators, apparently as much in Canada as in America, have reduced schooling to job training at the expense of moral nurturing. But such a critique requires a careful examination of *what* teachers teach. An educationist first and last, McLaren cannot bring himself to go beyond the *how* of ritual and method. He prefers to challenge educators to "develop a curriculum of cultural politics [that] runs athwart the logic of capital and the hegemonic hold of Late Capitalism." This task will involve the "deconstruction and displacement . . . of the centrality of symbolic manipulation and moral violence . . . which is necessary in order to promote the insurrection of subjugated student voice and the creation of a pedagogy of self-empowerment." Reading such statements, one is left with the uneasy feeling that the power in "empowerment" exists for no other reason than to be exercised. If so, McLaren's ritual and method are really metaphors for manipulation and control. The only question is who will do the controlling.

This is what results when mere power and liberation replace the virtue and piety Christianity once supplied. Classroom norms, such as obeying teachers, working diligently, paying attention, telling the truth, and growing up—once regarded as absolute goods—suddenly acquire the ominous label "the structure of conformity." Goofing off in class becomes "the antistructure of resistance." (What happens to an orderly class where some teaching might really be done is anybody's guess.) The nihilism implicit in this inversion of meaning does not seem to worry McLaren. In such a world he glimpses a hazy utopian future where "knowledge and freedom meet once and forever." Yet, again, without the defining, limiting Word, this project leads only to the abyss McLaren hopes to span. It is in fact the death of real freedom and morality.

Alan Peshkin's *God's Choice* is a less disturbing book than McLaren's. It is a straightforward presentation of Peshkin's findings on evangelical Christian education, focusing on one Bethany Baptist Academy in "Hartney," Illinois. Peshkin notes that important as pure academics are at Bethany, morality is the first concern of the teachers. Moreover, the system works amazingly well, since the students and teachers obey the rules of Scripture. Bethany's students tend to graduate "as loyal, honest, hard-working, punctual, and reliable young adults." They revere God, accept Christ as their Savior, regard robbery, lying, and cheating as sins, frown on drugs, and show every indication of carrying these beliefs into maturity. To his credit, Peshkin does not appear to find any traces of "the hegemonic hold of Late Capitalism" in these virtues and concludes that fundamentalist Christian schooling, though not an absolute good, is a qualified good.

All is not rosy, however, in *God's Choice*. For one thing, Peshkin betrays a surprising ignorance of the Bible (Old and New Testaments)—an odd trait for a man who is both a Jew and an American. Doctrines such as the Fall and God's sovereignty seem never to have crossed his mind. This sort of theological and cultural amnesia would have been impossible for the average high-school student 50 years ago. That a sensitive and intelligent university professor should display a near complete ignorance of such matters reveals the gulf separating the academic community from the Christian tradition.

Next and equally unsettling is Peshkin's inevitable cry for pluralism, which he sees as the only safeguard against a Christian persecution of non-Christians. What Peshkin doesn't realize is that pluralism, designated nowadays the ultimate civic virtue, can easily lead to amorality opening the door to discordant variations on the theme of power: terror and tyranny. In the absence of the divine Word, the authority to permit certain acts and forbid others loses its ability to direct the minds of men toward the good.

To a great extent, the nihilism that undergirds the politics of power has the West in a stranglehold. Books like *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* are evidence of its grip. The one glimmer of hope in American and, hence, Western education is the Christian school. Christianity, far from establishing dictatorships, prevents them by subjecting all men to a final arbiter and by limiting the scope of men's deeds with the rule of law. The American ethos has implicitly rested on the moral basis most commonly taught in Christian schools. It may be possible to destroy that ethos; it is impossible to remain free and preserve our American character without it. Peshkin's cautious admiration of Christian education suggests a faint grasp of this fact. The sooner others grasp it, the better for all of us.

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Frog Bullfinch

***The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* by Pierre Grimal, translated by A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell; $34.95.**

A useful handbook on classical mythology is an indispensable volume for any library. It is strange that a translation of Grimal's 1951 work was needed, but here it is. Of the works in English, Smith is too large and out of date, while Robert Graves is delightful but hopelessly eccentric. At an affordable price, Grimal's some 600 pages of lucid entries fill the bill admirably.

Some Place in Time

by Tommy W. Rogers

***Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century* by Pete Daniels, New York: Hill & Wang; $7.95.**

"Rural areas are shrinking, accents are becoming less distinct, and Southerners are being tamed," writes Pete Daniels of the changes which have transformed the agrarian nation of Davis and Lee into the modern South. Daniels may have his feet planted firmly in earthy Southern history, but there has *not been* a concerted demand by creationists that six-day creation be presented as *fact*: The Moral Majority has *not* foreclosed debate in America; there has *not* been a "heavy-handed purge" by those Southern Baptists who seek to hold organizational representatives accountable to their sponsoring constituency; the Bible does *not* warn against either Jerry Falwell or Jesse Helms as "pitfalls along the road to righteousness"; and neither Falwell nor Oral Roberts established universities with purpose to "restrict curriculums and content."

Doubtless, as Flannery O'Connor's Haze Motes testifies, fundamentalist religion can warp and destroy. And it may be, as Daniels asserts, that a "surprising percentage of those who watch . . . evangelists . . . are the same people who watch wrestling and soap-operas, go to stock-car races, cockfights, and rock 'n' roll concerts," but his claim that "many believers patronize only Christian owned businesses" (as sacrosanct a civil rights mobilization as that may be in the *right* hands) is a development of which few other than Daniels are aware. Daniels is doubtless as sincere as Baptist preachers (as generic types) who do not hold prevarication on religious and/or pecuniary matters as dishonest, but his claim that the "religious right" represents a "retrenchment from the modern world" which "leapfrogs from the present to biblical times," along with his contention that fundamentalists seek "to build a heaven on earth," leaves one wondering if Daniels is serious. It may be that the God of the Fundamentalists has not advanced commensurately with social science enlightenment or that Fundamentalists have "cut themselves off from the flow of history" by not networking or goosestepping with New Age awareness; however, the utopian quest is so alien to the dispensational eschatology generally endorsed by fundamentalist Christendom that such a claim as Daniels' is as divorced from reality as a Robert McNamara pronouncement on Vietnam.

It is Ham's shadow which defines Daniels' vision—from the stompin' and screamin' over the presence of too many whites at Fisk University (a major training site for black physicians) in the 1920's, to tantrums at not being able to mix with whites in classrooms and restrooms in the 1950's and 60's. *Standing at the Crossroads* is so doused with negrophobia that it exudes more grease than a hamburger from a drive-in movie. Even *I'll Take My Stand*, an intransigent statement against the agribusiness preemption of the human dimension and the uncritical endorsement of alleged progress, is regarded as almost insignificant because it was restricted to primary questions.

Daniels is still livid that the North Carolina electorate rejected Frank Graham, who had been annointed by Eleanor Roosevelt. Purveyors of the liberal faith seem to live in fear of potential cleansing by the indigenous electorate. Representatives of original sin, such as Jesse Helms (who, from Daniels' account, is *the* epitome of evil), still cast disreputable shadows. In the South of the new status quo, Citizen's Council members are no longer welcomed speakers at civic club luncheons, but even so, evil survives in code words (like "cuts") and political alignments with media evangelists. Daniels finds it convenient not to recognize the difference between state enfranchisement of religion and the refusal of persons with a biblically derived life-and-world view to disregard that consciousness in their evaluation of public issues.

Nevertheless, *Standing at the Crossroads* should not simply be dismissed. While Daniels offers unswerving orthodoxy, he does so with admirable literary skill, and often with telling insight. *Standing at the Crossroads* is in some ways a warm and sensitive account of the changes by which Southland has been defined in this century. The anecdotes often poignantly capture the oppression of blacks, sharecroppers, debtors, and mill hands who stood unprotected against the landlords, furnish merchants, and agents of civil authority.

The bibliographical essays accompanying each chapter are excellent, as are the text surveys of Southern literature. The account of liberalism in action via New Deal agricultural policy is an apologetic masterpiece. Daniels calls this episode of applied liberalism "The Conservative Revolution." Even he is able to recognize that the artificial raising of agricultural prices and the driving of yeoman operators off the land was a method of diverting money, power, and privilege to overprivileged agribusinessmen, banks, and mortgage and life insurance companies.

Times, people, places, and land have changed. No longer is life so attuned to the rhythm of the seasons. It is a different time from the days when, as late as the early 1960's, most of organized society in the South—politics, economics, education—held that a sizable component of the citizenry should sit in the back. The dynamics of the second deconstruction—the mass stupidities whereby Dr. King's most faithful allies in the South were his avowed opponents and provided the civil rights movement with the violence its legislative policy required—are sympathetically depicted.

Norms of racial segregation have atrophied along with the system of government that harbored pluralism.

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Schools, restaurants, jobs are integrated. Blacks, sanctioned by public opinion and legal favor, are becoming increasingly racist. Even so, rural blacks and whites still know each other and mix at work and the crossroads stores. Daniels thinks it ironic that "it has been rural Southerners who have most easily adjusted to the changing way of life." Perhaps he does not realize that, in the rural South, the communal identification which transcends race still exists *in spite* of change. Some things *do* remain as they ever were. But, as Daniels puts it, "Southerners are being tamed." To that extent, the prospects for retention of this communal sympathy may not be good.

Tommy Rogers, a former collegiate professor of sociology in Louisiana and Georgia, resides in exile in Jackson, Mississippi.

Now That the Dust Has Settled

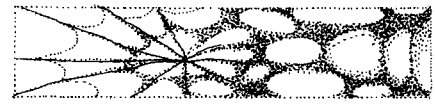
by Jane Greer

Cross Ties by X.J. Kennedy, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

The Drive-In by R.S. Gwynn, Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press.

American poetry has for the past few decades been going through what can only be called an adolescence, discarding rules and conventions simply because they existed. Poetry and all the arts go through a healthy siege of anarchy every so often, but this was more like terrorism than a revolution; these revolutionaries, unlike the Romantics, had no idea of what to substitute for what they'd destroyed. Instead, they simply *wrote*, spilling their guts down the pages of fashionable and underground journals in two-word-wide, uncapitalized entrails of self-obsession.

As in most revolutions, the revolutionaries eventually became the bourgeoisie, fat and complacent, ripe for plucking. But the new "revolution" really isn't one. The din of gleeful disruption having died down to an occasional emission from some university English department or another, we are left with what's been there all the time, indestructible: *real poetry*. Its diligent architects are so obviously superior to the dull burghers of free verse that it's now bad taste for an editor to ask for submissions of "experimental"



poetry. "Craft" is the buzzword today, even to poets and editors who have no idea what it might mean. X.J. Kennedy and R.S. Gwynn are notable exceptions.

A youngish old pro, X.J. Kennedy is as well-known for his children's books and college English texts (written with his wife, Dorothy) as for his poems. Kennedy, who lives and writes in Bedford, Massachusetts, is surely the best friend young poets have today (I speak from experience, and I don't even know him well), as tough-minded about his own muscular poems as he is about others'. His first poetry collection, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, won him the Lamont Award for Poetry in 1961 when he was a callow youth of 32. Many of Kennedy's early and best-loved poems are in *Cross Ties*—"Little Elegy," "Nude Descending a Staircase," "Ars Poetica"—surrounded by newer or less-known poems.

It would be dead wrong to describe Kennedy's poems as supercilious—but he does seem always to have an eyebrow cocked at life. A good Christian man, Kennedy also appreciates the pagan roots of human behavior. He's marvelous writing about erotic passion ("By the cold glow that lit my lover's eye / I could read what page eight had said to try" is "Sex Manual" in its entirety), even better writing tenderly about his wife and family. Not a poem in this collection of "every poem that the poet cares to save" contains a superfluous word or syllable. At 166 pages, *Cross Ties* is organic in arrangement and flawless in nearly every instance. X.J. Kennedy will still be admired by poets and readers when the *next* New Wave of poetry crackheads comes and goes, and the one after that.

R.S. Gwynn is associate professor of English (but don't hold that against him) at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. His poems, translations, and critical articles have appeared in such places as *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *Playboy*, although this is his first book of poems.

X.J. Kennedy writes, for the cover of Gwynn's book, "Verse so strictly crafted is rare, yet Gwynn is no mere tinkering formalist: his work has equal parts of passion, energy, and outrageousness. Poem after poem reads like a tightly corked explosion. . . . Here is a mature, slowly perfected voice with its own distinctive power and resonance." Kennedy is exactly right about Gwynn. I wasn't previously familiar with his work, and the loss is mine. Gwynn's poems are dark, often bitter, and exquisitely clever, yet generous in theme. A less mature poet would have been done in by such outrage, but Gwynn is in complete control.

Since no poem in *The Drive-In* is "representative" of the whole, the wonderfully named "Untitled" may serve as introduction:

In the morning light a line
Stretches forever. There my
unlived life
Rises, and I resist. . . .
—Louis Simpson

In which I rise untroubled by
my dreams,
In which my unsung theories
are upheld
By massive votes, in which my
students' themes
Move me, in which my name
is not misspelled;

In which I enter strangers'
rooms to find,
Matched in unbroken sets,
immaculate,
My great unwritten books, in
which I sign
My name for girls outside a
convent gate;

In which I run for daylight and
my knee
Does not fold up, in which the
home teams win,
In which my unwed wife steeps
fragrant tea
In clean white cups, in which
my days begin

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With scenes in which, across
unblemished sands,
Unborn, my children come to
touch my hands.

Jane Greer edits Plains Poetry Journal.

The Revenge of History

by Michael Warder

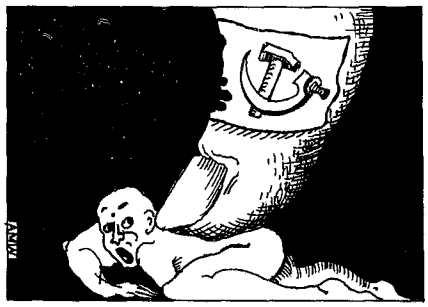
Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union From 1917 to the Present **by Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, New York: Summit Books.**

History has a way of taking its revenge on those who would violate it. It does not forget. Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich are some of the few Soviet-born intellectuals who have studied how much current Soviet policies and propaganda abuse Russian history. Their book is an eloquent effort to set straight the historical record since the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in 1917. It is thorough, balanced, and massively documented with primary sources from a broad range of scholarship. With apologies to Dr. Donald Treadgold (author of the classic *Twentieth Century Russia*), *Utopia in Power* is now the best general history of the Soviet Union available.

A fourth of the book is devoted to the first five years of Communist Party rule, culminating in the death of Lenin, whose legacy is a key for understanding all that follows. Stalin is presented as the natural heir to Lenin, because he alone among the survivors grasped the fundamental truth: Marxism-Leninism is essentially an ideology to preserve and expand power. So long as this requirement is met, any expedient policy is justifiable.

In March of 1918, Lenin demanded that a peace treaty be signed with imperialist Germany at Brest-Litovsk, which would give the Germans the Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltic states—all of which belonged to Imperial Russia. Trotsky, Bukharin, and others were opposed to this compromise with capitalism, but Lenin reasoned that the treaty allowed the Communists to hold power, from which all else would follow.

In addition to leading the Soviet Union into the civil war and the famine of 1921-22, thereby causing over 15 million deaths, Lenin also created and presided over the Soviet secret police, the propaganda and censorship apparatus, the concentration camps, the state planning of the economy, and the structure of the party and government. With the exception of the 15 million, all of these achievements live on today, in the Soviet Union of Mikhail Gorbachev—including the sophistry and rationales for proposed reforms.



Heller and Nekrich make a compelling case that Stalin was the logical successor to Lenin. An instinct for power dominated his commitment to Marxism-Leninism. Killing and deporting Kulaks, collectivizing, and later starving the peasants, executing his fellow revolutionaries, decapitating his armed forces on the eve of World War II, and signing a pact with Nazi Germany all showed Stalin's priority—the extension of power, even if it meant nearly destroying his country. As Hitler's armies swept through the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the Balts, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and others escaped their Soviet masters, Stalin rallied his people with, of all things, an appeal to ancient Russian Orthodoxy and patriotism. The Soviet deaths from World War II (13.6 million soldiers; 7.7 million civilians) and citizens killed by the Soviet State (25-60 million) are some of the grim ingredients of Stalin's omelette.

It is frequently asserted that the brutality of Lenin and Stalin was a necessary part of their attempt to modernize the Soviet Union. The facts are that in 1910 the Russians, with a population of 180 million, exported 40 percent of the world's grain. Seventy years later they are massively importing it. Their housing, on a per capita basis, in 1940 was half of what it was before 1917. There is a good case to be made that the Bolshevik seizure of power actually set back industrialization.

Heller and Nekrich have a soft spot for Khrushchev. They do point out his brutality in 1956 in Hungary and his naiveté and amateurism in causing sudden policy changes in agriculture, the military, literature and the arts (his "Thaw" refroze almost as soon as it began). But Khrushchev did one redeeming thing: He exposed the evils of Stalin. Admittedly, he did it to implicate potential rivals to power, but he did do it.

In addition to providing a wealth of statistics on economic decline and growth during the different eras of Soviet power, Nekrich and Heller also bring to light the historical circumstances and policies toward the family, religion, culture, and education. They present detailed accounts of the artists and writers who chose to support and legitimize the regime: those like Gorky, Ehrenburg, Eisenstein, as well as of those who defied it: Zamyatin, Pasternak, Mandelstam, Solzhenitsyn, and many others. The whys and the hows of state control of social and cultural institutions are poorly understood in the West, with our basic premise of limited government. Soviet totalitarianism must weave everything together, in a web of total control.

In the United States there is now intense discussion of the extent to which education should teach the Judeo-Christian moral tradition as opposed to simply teaching mental skills. From *Pravda* of June 9, 1984, we learn a different idea: "Their (the schools') job is to awaken the aspiration to become an exemplary soldier." From *Problems of Philosophy*, again in 1984, we learn that: "It is as though the army at a certain stage takes the 'baton' from the family or the labor or educational collectives, and later, after active duty as a fighting man has been completed, the army returns it—now with a higher level of breeding—to the same or other collectives of the types mentioned above." So much for the debate on values in education.

Sometimes, the authors speculate: The breakdown of the Soviet-American disarmament talks of 1960

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due to the U-2 incident and other issues is interpreted as a capitulation to the Chinese, who distrusted a Soviet-American accord. It seems more likely that a Soviet desire to catch up in nuclear weapons had to be the prime motivator—not a concern for Chinese opinion.

The authors also believe that the Soviets sensed President Kennedy's strong resolve through his meeting with Khrushchev in June of 1961, as well as his subsequent management of the Berlin Wall crisis of August 1961. More likely, Khrushchev saw Kennedy as young and inexperienced, especially after the Bay of Pigs fiasco of April 1961, which in turn led to the crisis of the Berlin Wall. The U.S. response to the Wall could hardly be called resolute, and it is likely that the June Summit contributed to the impression of weakness. These weak reactions probably led to the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, when we finally did stand up to the Soviets.

Given the nearly 70 years of the practice of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union, a time longer than the average span of life in that country, it would be reasonable to expect some proofs of a superiority of Soviet life over that of the West—the claim that had set the original Revolution in motion. Instead, Soviet living standards are those of the Third World; rates of alcoholism are the world's worst; and the rate of imprisonment is more than 3.5 times greater than the U.S.

Nikita Khrushchev, dictating his memoirs in the late 1960's, makes a point about emigration: "It's incredible to me that after fifty years of Soviet power, paradise should be kept under lock and key." Of course, if smiling Mikhail Gorbachev really did want to practice openness, he should simply join the international community and allow all of his workers the right to emigrate from his paradise. That would be a sure sign that the Soviet system is superior and that its leaders actually believe in it. If that idea were too radical, however, perhaps Gorbachev would first allow Soviet citizens an opportunity to read *Utopia in Power*.

Michael Warder is executive vice president of The Rockford Institute.

Sums of Disenchantment

by Stephen L. Tanner

Figures of Enchantment **by Zulfikar Ghose, New York: Harper & Row; $15.95.**

Zulfikar Ghose was born in Pakistan, grew up in British India, emigrated to England in 1952, and since 1969 has taught in the English department of the University of Texas. He is married to a Brazilian and has enough knowledge of South America to write novels set there. This is his 10th novel. He has also published a collection of stories (with B.S. Johnson), an autobiography, four volumes of poetry, and two books of literary criticism.

Given this varied background and considerable writing experience, one is not surprised at this novel's skillful presentation of a fascinating variety of human types and behavior. The story begins in an unnamed country on South America's western coast, where a poorly paid government clerk, Felipe Gamboa, dreams of Pacific islands, a better salary, and a successful marriage for his 16-year-old daughter. But, on his way home from work, he discovers his beloved daughter in the embrace of Frederico, a poor neighbor boy. Furious, Gamboa separates them and drags the daughter home. The next day, while eating a sack lunch in a public square, he is mistakenly arrested with a group of antigovernment demonstrators and ends up adrift in the Pacific in a small boat.

The focus then shifts to Frederico, who is also a dreamer about money and Pacific islands. Immediately after the scuffle with his girlfriend's father, he is caught up in a bizarre series of adventures involving an alleged magic amulet, numerous sexual encounters with older women, and mindless participation in an international crime syndicate.

After 18 years, Gamboa and Frederico meet again on a small Pacific island off the South American coast. Gamboa has another daughter by another woman, exactly the age of his first daughter when he was whisked away. On this barren island, the novel, marked by fantasy and surrealism throughout, comes to its peculiar, violent end, while hints of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provide ironic resonance. The island has its Prospero and Caliban, and bogus magic animates the entire story—this is no brave new world but a "dead world" of ashes, nuclear waste, and political oppression.

Despite its treatment of the appalling contrasts between wealth and poverty and, more incidentally, of the inhumane corruption of an anti-Communist military government, *Figures of Enchantment* is ultimately unconcerned with politics and social justice. The principal theme is human self-deception. One of the meanings of "figures" in the title is money figures. Repeatedly, the characters are calculating the freedom and self-indulgence they are sure money will provide. Their existences are caught up in the self-deceptive arithmetic of wanting more than they possess. And, with Ghose, the delusions spun out of the desire for money are a manifestation of a fundamental human habit of delusion in general. At one point Gamboa glimpses mankind as "flowing impetuously, and without thought, toward another world where an intenser misery awaited it than it had known, but that in its thoughtless drive it was sustained by the belief that it proceeded toward a land of enchanting pleasures." This bleak parable encapsulates the world of Ghose's novel. In an essentially nihilistic vision, in which no person or endeavor warrant our sympathy, human consciousness becomes rationalization and illusion, generated by the "self's combat with its shadow."

The dust jacket touts "undreamed-of adventures in sensuality and metaphysics." The sensuality turns out to be abundant sexual description bordering on the pornographic, while the metaphysics translates into little more than vague, self-consciously poetic passages on self, time, magic, and dreams.

Ghose is a master at describing the human genius for deceiving itself, but he forgets that self-deception is a powerful theme only granted the possibility of its opposite.

Stephen L. Tanner is professor of English at Brigham Young University.

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Letter From French America

by Russell Desmond

Francophobia on the Right

Several years ago in Paris I was surprised to find young pamphleteers outside the Hôtel de Ville (or "Chateau Chirac" as an acquaintance would say) shouting out, "Down with the bearded, sold-out socialists!" When I told friends at home, they seemed incredulous. After Reagan bombed Libya I remember that the people of England and West Germany, our supposed allies, demonstrated in the streets against us. The French people—despite the complaints of Mitterrand's government—did not. After the first revelations of Reagan's dealing with Iran, two young Frenchwomen, otherwise inclining typically to the left, told me, "We were not surprised; nor were we disappointed." So many times I see evidence of French affinities with American policies go unnoticed, unreported—I often wonder, for instance, why there is not more talk among American conservatives about Raymond Aron's subtle attacks on the Annales school of historians, or about Etienne Mantoux's denunciation of Keynes.

Part of the problem lies in fundamental differences in temperament. We "Anglo-Saxons" (in De Gaulle's endearing phrase) who are shocked at the proliferation of nudity on the *Côte d'Azur* probably cannot imagine how horrified the French are at our tolerance of episodes of public drunkenness! French political thought is inextricably entwined around their intensely factional politics—a territory particularly forbidding to outsiders. It is a volatile, intricate kind of chess game entirely lacking the relative stability of our two-party system. I do not envy the student of history who seeks to disentangle the eight Wars of the French Reformation, the 13 or so different French regimes which have followed 1789, or the more than 100 changes of cabinet of their Third Republic. Yet beneath this hotheaded surface rest continuities which are perhaps deeper than those we claim. This system provokes strange incongruities: Many Americans might be surprised to learn that J.J. Rousseau was adamantly *against* violent revolution or that the atheist Diderot admonished Boucher for the lack of morals in his paintings. Ironically, the "enemy of the Church," Ernest Renan, agreed with the positivist Taine and the socialist Jaurès that religion was a very important base of politics. The specific political affiliations which rendered such seemingly like-minded classical liberals as Sainte-Beuve, Constant, Thiers, Guizot, and Tocqueville political antagonists are almost indecipherable to us. Yet a consequence is paid. I, for instance, am convinced that Tocqueville's hostility to the July Monarchy has brought undue prejudice against his former professor, François Guizot, a man who virtually dominated half a century of French political thought. Guizot, the Protestant Prime Minister to King Louis Philippe, is still largely unknown to the English-speaking world.

Another difficulty is that French conservative thought—anti-Enlightenment and counterrevolutionary—is invariably allied with two institutions alien to the mainstream of the Anglo-American tradition: Roman Catholi-

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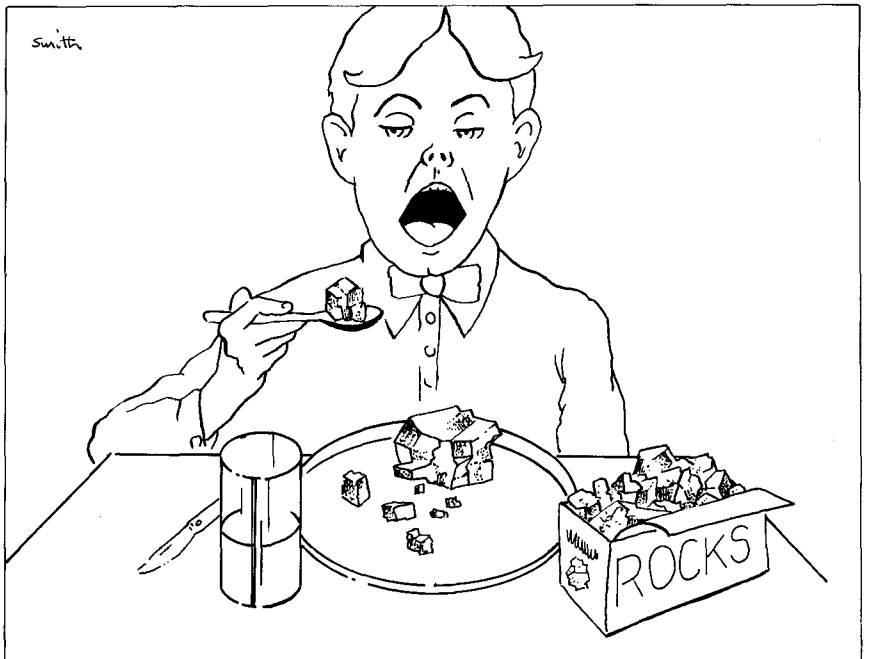

Arnold Finally Discovered A Food Without Artificial Preservatives

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cism and the French monarchy. Without buying the entire *ultramontane* program, I would suggest that American conservatives could learn from the royalists' critiques of democracy in the same way John Adams versed himself in the history of traditional monarchies. Adams, the puritan second President of a republic, often found himself defending the monarchical Elder Daughter of the Church—of course he always looked with suspicion and disdain on the products of the Enlightenment in a way which would place him more in league with the old French right than with that part of Tocqueville who passionately defended the Enlightenment reformer Turgot (incidentally, conservatives finding Tocqueville's *mi-croyant* detachment a far cry from the flag-bearing traditionalism of Burke might discover a missing link in the writings of Alexis' teacher Royer-Collard). With his obsession with the issue of executive authority, Adams would have certainly admired De Gaulle's Fifth Republic presidency as a resolution of almost 100 years of French executive weakness. In many ways, the French president today is stronger and more freely in command of his forces than ours: witness even the socialist Mitterrand sending 2,000 troops to Tchad with no one batting an eye.

A further difficulty which Americans encounter when examining French conservatism is a certain dizziness upon seeing the depths and extremes revealed beneath the surface. Although almost inconceivable to us, we might remember that the 31 attempted assassinations of De Gaulle did not originate in the political spectrum to his *left*. We "Anglo-Saxons" might also be astonished to discover an entire school of thought which considers our illustrious Magna Carta a scheming device by which ambitious nobles succeeded in weakening the power of the English sovereign before his enemies, much like the feudal revolt deceptively titled "the League of the Public Good," led by Charles the Bold against the crown of Louis XI. For a thousand years many Frenchmen have taken for granted the idea that their monarchy once provided a flawed but effective stabilizing and civilizing force in a Dark Age riddled with the vicissitudes of democratic mob rule. This view was put most cogently in Maurras' piquant phrase, "The parliamentary system, according to Montesquieu a product of the Teuton forests, is a barbaric machine, too slow and too cumbersome . . . this Merovingian chariot must make way for the automobile."

The long shadow of this angry old man, Charles Maurras, hangs over the French conservative tradition of the past hundred years. His adversaries accuse him of fulfilling Sainte-Beuve's prophecy, "In France we shall remain Catholic long after we have ceased to be Christians." Yet those quick to remind us his writings were condemned by the Vatican in 1926 rarely go on to remember the ban was lifted in 1939. And with typical liberal duplicity, the French publishing house Gallimard has conspicuously refused to print his voluminous work in their plush *Pléiade* series, preferring to publish the work of such other noted anti-Semites as Voltaire and Céline. The disinterment of the French right from its lamentable postwar status will not occur until the exact nature of Maurras' collaboration with the Vichy government is reexamined. Anyone familiar with his writings knows that if

REVISIONS

Blurbs

James Dickey has written a new book, *Alnilam* (New York: Doubleday; $19.95), and it is unclear why. Perhaps Dickey just had to prove himself by speaking—a wordless writer being too Zen to appeal to his common sense.

Alnilam is set in World War II (in which Dickey served as a fighter pilot) and describes the trials and tribulations of a Frank Cahill, recently blind from adult diabetes. Cahill also has a son, whom he has never seen and who is presumed dead, the victim of a mysterious Air Corps training accident. Fairly early on, however, it becomes apparent that both Cahill and his son are metaphorical (Life, Disease, Death, Sight, "On his Blindness," The Meaning of Manhood, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, shades of James Jones, *Top Gun*, all thickly rolled together), as if Dickey has forgotten (for a short while, let us hope) that metaphors are supposed to conjure life, not the other way around.

Much of the book is quite simply repulsive: an invalid lady bather unstrapping her prosthetic leg while Cahill, the Peeping Tom proprietor of a public pool, masturbates behind a two-way mirror; Cahill, stepping into his own excrement, offers it to his sight-seeing dog, Zack, to sniff at, as proof of their shared spunk. Zack, a German Shepherd, 160 lbs. and growing, we can excuse; Dickey, a former football player, poet, celebrity, we cannot.

What the world is like, we may never know. Yet, to divide it between *light* and *dark* (Dickey's unique, screenplay device, the *dark* column set off in bold type) is to recall Mani the Persian; it would not be inconceivable to have the next Dickey fiction set in Aztec Mexico, with the main character being a kidnapped and castrated Viking, impressed into the chest-ripping priestly class. After all, Cahill's mythical son, Joel, leader of a sinister Nordic cult, is not a far cry from that.

Writers of celebrity (if not of stature) have an obligation to words. Diabetes is a debilitating disease—to depict it in graphic detail in order to confront us with our own latent (or galloping) debility (and the possibility of Redemption Through Suffering) is puerile. Dickey the poet, and the author of *Deliverance*, should have more reverence for the divine gift of language. When words lose their value, the world pales, and no amount of sniffing can bring it back.

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there was one ethnic group Maurras distrusted *more* than the Jews, it was the Germans. He moved his newspaper to a nonoccupied zone of France and continually criticized the Nazis throughout the war. And his political dream, based on decentralized, autonomous regional governments with a benevolent monarchial head in Paris, had nothing in common with the totalitarianism of Hitler's henchmen. Although history proved him wrong, he sincerely believed that De Gaulle's rebels would bring a Communist takeover in France. Certainly, with the high percentage of Communists in the Resistance in the South of France, where the memory of the war between Catholics and Communists in Spain was very vivid, there was some justification for his fears. Most Americans—having never lost a war on our home ground and believing the French cowardly lost theirs with Germany after four days and not, as is more accurate, after 70 years of bloodletting—will never understand the tragedy of those years of civil war in France, symbolized so vividly by De Gaulle's painful decision to wage war against the namesake and godfather of his own son, Marshal Pétain. Nor will we see the analogy of Pétain to Robert E. Lee. Would not Lee have condemned the resurgent Ku Klux Klan as anarchists the way Maurras condemned the Resistance as Communists? Even those less forgiving towards Maurras must admit the strong parallels of his decentralizing policies with those of a Southern statesman like John C. Calhoun. For that matter, were not Maurras' Provençal *félibres* somehow akin to our own homespun Southern agrarians? Is there not a certain parallel between the patriotic, populist writings of a *camelot du roi* like Bernanos and the writings of a man like Donald Davidson, both trying desperately to keep alive the best of the old world and the new? Witness the youthful Bernanos' indictment of the pacifist philosopher Alain, "When the blood of young Frenchmen is flowing everywhere, it is not to an obscure sophist like yourself that the mothers will hold up their immolated sons." Or the older Bernanos' honest efforts at expunging the taint of anti-Semitism from French traditionalism, "I am only 'racist' in the manner in which I affirm that there *are* races . . . that racism of the German Nazis or the American KKK has always been, for a Frenchman, a disgusting monstrosity."

Robert Speaight, Bernanos' biographer, hits a visionary cue when he says, "Bernanos, like Brückberger, was more an antique Trojan than a Greek." Following the example of the courtly, chivalric tradition of Aeneas on through to France's gift of Roman traditions and civil law might prove useful to a country like ours, sweating and struggling beneath the excesses of a precedent-ridden Anglo-Saxon legal system. "The weakness and frailty of a constitution are in exact proportion to the number of constitutional provisions that are written" (Joseph de Maistre). Who knows? Perhaps the French kings had the right idea in calling their legislative body only in emergencies, wars, famines, and the like—instead of paying a bunch of full-time politicians/lawyers year-in and year-out to think up more and more unnecessary laws. "The state will never leave go of what it once has taken" (Bernanos).

Russell Desmond writes from New Orleans.

Letter From Hollywood

by Father Andrew L.J. James

Take 'Em to Court!

Americans are said to be a litigious people. So powerful is our desire to justify ourselves that there is even a man who was willing to let himself be called a thief and a liar in front of millions of people, rather than pay me $60 for an article he had pirated.

It started this way: I read through *Writer's Market*, 1984, and found the name of a religious publication which claims it wants "exposés," and not any "All's well with Christ" manuscripts. Since they seemed to want to be trendier than thou, I decided theirs would be a good magazine to send an article about the establishment of an Eastern Orthodox ministry at Chillicothe Correctional Institute, in central Ohio. They seemed to like the article too; they published it, but as a letter to the editor!

Since I have routinely placed the words "Copyright, date, all rights reserved" on material which I have submitted for publication for pay—which would protect the matter in question, until such time a magazine would offer "First North American serial rights" payment—the editor had not just been ethically unconscionable but had broken the law.

I wrote him to say, "If you thought my material was worthy of publication, you should have paid me. If you thought it unworthy, you should have rejected it. You did neither."

He lamely responded: "We gave you credit for it." He would make the same remark (with the editorial addition of the adjective "full" in an appropriate place) to Judge Wapner at the hearing: "We gave him full credit for it," meaning they published my name as the author.

I demanded payment. The editor refused. I took up the matter with the California Attorney General's Office. They contacted the editor, who indicated to them he would make amends. He did nothing.

I sued the gentleman in the small claims court, in Fullerton, California. Before long, I received a telephone call from one of the producers of *The People's Court*, who invited me to appear on the show. "I would be willing," I said, "to call them thieves and liars in front of millions of other people, but I expect they will not want that."

But they did. I flew to California, where Tim Owen (an aspiring actor from Ohio who works as a production assistant for Ralph Edwards Productions) picked me up at Burbank and hustled me into Hollywood to the studio.

The plane was an hour and a half late; they were already filming one segment when we arrived. The defendant peeked at me from behind a screen. One of the producers said: "Keep talking. Talkers tend to win." No matter what Judge Wapner decided, I had won. I had brought the miscreants to "justice," even if it was the sort only Hollywood can provide.

The Judge heard both sides, then went out for the commercial break saying: "I'll be back and give you my

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decision." The decision was for the plaintiff. Things have come so far in America that the editors of a magazine were content to be publicly disgraced for an appearance fee.

Father Andrew L.J. James is an Eastern Orthodox priest in Athens, Ohio.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Beginnings Past All Remembering

The Knights of Columbus Club is just beginning to buzz as we pull up at 7:45, 15 minutes fashionably late. Our cars hold two families of three people each; the two small boys—cousins, one in each car, for sanity's sake—love each other madly and can't bear the five-minute drive from our dinner at Bonanza. My husband's aunt and uncle have been married for 48 years, and their children are throwing them a party.

The club manager directs us into the room. To the left as we enter is the guest book, presided over by my husband's cousin's wife and their infant son. To the right is a long table with old and new family pictures. Wearing a corsage and boutonniere, Milly and Joe greet their guests.

My husband and I, and his sister and her husband, sit next to my mother-in-law at a table full of family. The little boys and their three younger cousins whiz off, playing tag as far from us as possible. They use the punchbowl as home base, and I worry. (I worry about it all, actually, and if I had my way our seven-year-old son would sit politely next to me and converse intelligently with his elders.) My husband tells me to relax: This is all *de rigueur* at dances, has been since Adam. I did it, too, in different ways, when I was a child, but wanting my son to be better than I am, I remain unconvinced. "Look how well I turned out," my husband adds. I force a smile. My sister-in-law grows soft-eyed reminiscing about going to dances as a little girl and then the long car ride home, sleepy in the backseat. "I could still hear the music as if it was in the car with us," she says. Eyeing the accordions on the stage, I fear it might be true.

About 8:30 the band comes in: Reiny and Burt on guitar and accordion, their names embroidered on their caps, and a third man on the drums. One of the children of the honored couple gets on the mike and says that the party is for them because they've been such wonderful parents. They're going to cut the cake now, he adds, and would everyone please stand up for a moment and gather around it? We hear him, but no one wants to be the first to walk across the empty dance floor, and after a second request they cut the cake attended only by five boys under eight years old, all in their Sunday best, greed in their eyes.

The first dance belongs to Milly and Joe, and now I know how they looked at each other at their wedding. Then there's a two-step, three waltzes, another two-step, then a couple of polkas and a schottische to which we polka. The only real deviation in rhythm during the evening is "Blue Spanish Eyes," performed without conviction. There's something comforting about participating in a dance whose beginnings lie past all remembering. I look around and guess that the percentage of divorces in this room must be nearly as low as in a pondful of Canada geese. These ranch and small-town couples of all shapes and sizes dance together as if they were breathing or pulling a calf or rolling over together in their sleep. I'd like to dance like that some day. "One flesh" takes on new meaning when one watches plain long-married folks doing a plain immemorial dance (which can, hours later, cramp up the legs of the immoderate).

The five small cousins, in groups of two and three according to age, discover Paradise. They sit on the dance-waxed floor and spin around. They swing each other by the hands as hard as they can and then let go, fall, and slide; drink waitresses dodge them deftly, used to it. My son is wearing a pair of white pants his grandmother gave him, and our table decides I'll need a whole bottle of Shout to get them clean. I tell my mother-in-law no, I'm just going to send them to her.

There are three extraordinarily pretty girls, cousins and friends, all quivering on the brink of teendom. They have asked the band to play what in my youth was called a bunny hop, and the band obliges gallantly. The girls form a line, each with her hands lightly, self-consciously on the hips of the girl before her, and they start their sedate, charming circle of little kicks and hops. A hitch: They have the floor to themselves. They tough it out, smiling bravely and trying to make nonchalant small talk among themselves as they move under the lights, although it's obvious they'd like the earth to swallow them up. The adults are not the only ones watching: I see my young son and his six-year-old cousin lying at the dark end of the dance floor, heads propped up on elbows, mouths wide open but motionless for once, entranced at the pretty sight. I grow firmer in my resolve to lock him in the basement during his teens.

At 9:30 the food is brought in, much of it prepared by Milly herself: anniversary cake, nuts, mints, dips and crackers and cold cuts, hot meatballs and chicken wings and french fried cauliflower in chafing dishes, relish trays, tropical fruit punch, and coffee. The boys are dancing on their toes now, too wound up to eat. My husband makes our son drink a Sprite, suspicious that the boys are innocently commandeering whatever beverage is handy when they get thirsty. I start to ask him if he did that, too, when he was a kid, but someone we haven't seen for a while bends over us and the thought gets lost. I know the answer, anyway.

There are more than a hundred people in the room, more family than I'll ever be able to meet or remember. Some are not family but friends, which amounts to almost the same thing. By 10:00—11:00 in the time zone we came from, just 90 miles east—we've all danced with each other if we're so inclined, caught up on the gossip, our son is rubbing his eyes as he hops up and down to the music, and I'm beginning to feel that way myself. My husband drives us to his sister's house, where we'll spend the night. I look at him and out at the clear sky, listen to the boys chattering tiredly, and it comes into my mind that a family is like a galaxy, whirling

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its giant arms and growing larger all the time, so large that where it stops nobody knows—and a marriage, thank God, is more than the sum of its partners. Time and patience effect a grace that mere *intent* never could. I close my eyes and can still hear the music.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

The Judgment of History

Satire is a difficult form these days. Reality keeps calling, and raising. Let me tell a story that illustrates the difficulty.

Last November, when President Reagan's Teflon began to wear thin, pundits began to write about how his "place in history" was being jeopardized. My buddy Tim, a historian, casually suggested that a President really needs professional historians on call to warn him about how history will judge his actions. I thought that was a funny idea. Tim and I started goofing on it, and we wound up writing a proposal to establish a "Council of Historical Advisors."

We pointed out that such a body would answer a real need. After all, every politician above the state-legislator level wants to be regarded with favor by history, and Presidents in their final years in office, especially, seem to worry about it a lot. They're not running for anything, and posterity doesn't even have a PAC, but they just can't kick the habit: They start to suck up to the electorate of Yet-to-be.

But history takes time (as Gertrude Stein remarked), and that makes them nervous. Since we can't poll the Great Unborn, obviously, we have to rely on speculation. But Tim and I argued that the judgment of history is too important to be left to well-meaning amateurs. We suggested that a panel of historians could be engaged to deliver official preliminary verdicts of history. If nothing else, that would free Presidents to worry about the things they're hired to worry about, and it might even save us in the future from embarrassments like high schools named after Warren G. Harding.

As we saw it, a Council of Historical Advisors would be like the Council of Economic Advisors—a body of experts to make the close calls and hard decisions and assess for the President how he'll stand in the past of the future. We suggested a set-up like that of the Supreme Court: a fixed number of members, nominated by the President and approved by the Senate, serving for life, contingent on good behavior. (Sure, the criteria for good behavior might be hard to establish, but those for life aren't self-evident either.) We wanted these provisions to guard against "council-packing" by Presidents tempted to believe that adverse judgments were the work of small-minded pedants trying to deny them their historical due.

Day to day, we suggested, the council could make itself useful by, for example, finding historical precedents for administration proposals, or making sure that policies said to be unprecedented really were. It could also remind busy Presidents and other top-level administration figures of the historical events commemorated by holidays like Thanksgiving, Columbus Day, the Fourth of July, and Christmas. Speechwriters could call the council with questions about the current state of historiography: "What's the latest on Squanto?" "William Bradford in Plymouth—still an important player?" "Remind me: What happened at Munich?" With answers in hand, speechwriters could use phrases like "history tells us" or "the lessons of history" in full confidence that, in a pinch, they could buck responsibility to the council.

But, we argued, it would be in times of crisis that the historical advisors would really earn their keep. A President could call in the council's chairman: "I want to invade," he might say, or "I want to cut a deal." Then: "What will be the judgment of history? Will it threaten my place in history?" The chairman would summon the advisors. (Robes of office—perhaps tweed—might be appropriate.) The council would solemnly deliberate and by formal vote determine history's verdict. Like economic forecasts, of course, it could be subsequently adjusted.

Proposals of this sort had come up before but had never gotten anywhere. When Fritz Hollings was running for President in 1984, he promised that he would shoot all the economists in government and replace them with historians, but this shameless pitch for historians' votes wasn't enough to get him the nomination. Eight years earlier, in 1976, we learned, a group of historians had actually, seriously urged President-elect Carter to set up a formal body like the one we were proposing, but historians were one special-interest group to which Carter did not respond.

We concluded that this could be a bold initiative, one that President Reagan could use to put his mark on the closing years of his administration. We predicted confidently that history would applaud. We wrote our proposal as an op-ed piece and fired it off to a number of your high-class dailies.

All of them turned us down. Every last one of them.

Now, I can understand the conservative ones doing that. Everything but the stock market seemed to be falling apart at the time, and they weren't in the mood for satire. But I must say that it was a bit of a puzzle when the *New York Times* didn't want it. I've never seen the *Times* pass up the chance to kick a conservative when he was down, and I thought anything that poked even mild fun at the Reagan administration would be a shoo-in. Tim and I began to think maybe the idea wasn't as amusing as we thought it was.

Then, lo and behold, nearly two months after we'd sent our piece to the *Times*, on last January 14, that paper's op-ed page carried a piece by Stuart E. Eizenstat. Eizenstat (whom some may recall as a figure from the forlorn Carter White House) called for the creation of a "White House secretariat . . . charged with providing the political appointees on the National Security Council and domestic policy staff with historical analogues, thereby helping keep Presidents out of trouble." Such an "institutionalized memory," he argued, would "reduce the likelihood that past mistakes would be repeated." Sound familiar?

Now, I certainly don't mean to suggest that the *Times* pilfered our idea and farmed it out. Great ideas often occur to many people more or less simultaneously; anyway, as I said, the idea was not a new one. But I do

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conclude from this episode that the *Times* appreciates flaky ideas only when people aren't facetious about them. Keep that in mind the next time you read what is unfortunately our nation's most influential newspaper.

John Shelton Reed is a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, recently appointed to the National Council on the Humanities.

Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

An Episode in Chianti

Still sealed in the gray velvet envelope of night, early morning in the Florentine countryside offers the June insomniac stray, loud cars, merciless crickets, and doomsday frogs. These supplant the earlier nightingales, thrashing *a capella*, as if lured by the glowworms whose light illuminates an equally desperate vanity. By daybreak, a storm begins; not the atmospheric, temperamental, barrels-down-the-stairs kind one gets just about anywhere; but the circumspect, snobbish kind that rumbles interrogatively, putting to the cypress, it seems, Farinata's eternal question, *Chi fuor li maggior tui?*—Who were your ancestors? And the cypress, following the other Tuscan's example, conceals nothing and makes all matters plain.

The window from which I lean out overlooks the gnarled olive trees of L'Ulivello, the Strada in Chianti estate that once belonged to Guglielmo Ferrero, the great historian and political thinker best known for his five-volume account of the self-destruction of the Roman republic and the settlement of Augustus, *The Greatness and Decline of Rome* (1902-1906). His grandson, my host, belongs to the small and ever-diminishing minority of American academics who, in his own words, "moonlight as thinkers"; he had given me Ferrero's *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (1914) to read, and insomnia was the inevitable consequence.

Over breakfast, there is no reason to talk about decline. Leo's wife, Larissa, is one of the world's leading Etruscan scholars, but the coffee is incredibly delicious. We do not venture out, not even to Florence, during our stay: let well enough alone, really. The food is simple, a rest after the gastronomic excesses of Rome's Via Panisperna, where this journey had begun, but the olive oil is heavy, fragrant, and green, the wine not so young, and the bread freshly baked.

In the evening, exhausted by the sunlight, Leo and I talk of this and that, smoke, sit outside. My mind still teems with impressions of Rome, revisited after an absence of some 15 years. How secret that city is! Everything goes on behind closed doors: You stand before a magnificent set of giant double doors in the middle of a crumbling, dirty wall and see a crumbling, dirty staircase leading to another set of doors, beyond which, if you are lucky, you may get a glimpse of some flowering bit of somebody's private paradise. Larissa says it's to fool the tax man, but it seems more fundamental than that. It's definitely to fool someone, though.

The glowworms remind me of a book I'd read before leaving England, Leonardo's Sciascia's *The Moro Affair*. Leo informs me that Sciascia, a Sicilian, used to move in very left-wing circles and is now a spokesman for the fashionable Radical Party, which had just had a professional stripper elected to parliament. I liked the book, and I tell my hosts about it.

Like any art, history abhors the middle ground, and Sciascia understands this. *The Moro Affair* is nothing less than a history of Italy, from March 16, 1978, when Aldo Moro, president of the National Council of Christian Democrats and architect of a political coalition of unprecedented breadth, was kidnapped by the Red Brigades, to his execution on May 9. Yet the intensity of Sciascia's obsession with his subject has little in common with the pedantry of an academic who devotes half a lifetime to the study of a single year in the history of a vanished kingdom; this book is controversial, which is why it's still fresh in my mind. To enlarge the metaphor with which Sciascia's musings about his nation begin, his is a glowworm's eye view of history.

What that eye has observed, above all, is the delicate pattern of democracy's impotence. The eye discerns every successive hypocrisy, evasion, and fabrication which covered up the tragic essence of Moro's abduction and murder, registering in minute detail the story of his abandonment by those who had hailed him as a Great Statesman until he asked for help like a mere mortal. In the words of the Socialist leader Pietro Nenni, "The Italian State is strong with the weak and weak with the strong," and it is totalitarianism—as represented by the Czechoslovakia-trained and Bulgaria-armed Red Brigades—that serves to remind us that democracy, in Italy or anywhere else, is worth the fight. The plain truth of *The Moro Affair* is that many democracies are not equipped for this or any other fight, and it is far easier for their elected leaders to fabricate self-serving myths of omnipotence and omniscience than to face that truth.

In the 55 days of Moro's ordeal, the Italian police put up 72,460 roadblocks, searched 37,702 residences, checked 3.3 million vehicles and 6.4 million individuals. As Sciascia demonstrates by his anatomic dissection of the police effort, it was all a farce. The police wanted to locate Moro and his kidnappers as little as the Italian government did: They did not want his return because they felt they could not secure it, and they could not secure it because, in the final analysis, nobody wanted it. The government stayed behind closed doors; the people stayed behind closed doors; Moro's family stayed behind closed doors; the Red Brigades stayed behind closed doors, too.

Sciascia does not mention Lear, but the similarity is striking. Like Lear, once Moro was separated from power, he became a liability to his political family. Their cruelty, duplicity, and indifference compel Sciascia to speak of "the two Stalinisms": theirs and the Red Brigades'. In his last letters from captivity, the man condemned by one "Stalinism" to die at the hands of the other, the real one, asked that only his family, his natural family, be present at his funeral. That was the last wish of a mere man, but all members of the government turned out for the funeral service: As a mere man, Moro was "not himself," and these Great Statesmen felt it appropriate to divide among themselves the garments of his reluctant martyrdom.

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Leo is grim. He is not moved by my summary of Sciascia's musings. "They did everything they could," he repeats.

They all did everything they could to save the olive trees of Chianti in the great freeze of February 1985, and yet the sudden and unprecedented blast of cold weather blighted almost a third of the trees, nearly half if the tally is made for all of Tuscany. Over the past two years, the desiccated trees have been mercilessly pruned, and frequent travelers have observed that the entire landscape of the province, with its slopes of pale green contrasting with the darker shades of cypress and umbrella pine, is now disturbingly different. But this autumn's crop should be better. Leo presents me with a big bottle of last year's oil to take back to England, and I am appreciative beyond measure.

This is the oil that turns an indifferent amateur into a great cook by the sheer fact of its presence on his kitchen shelf: not the mild Ligurian, not even the golden Sardinian or the delicate, pale Abruzzi, but this green, sharp Tuscan affair. A neighbor of Leo's still makes it the old way, by crushing the olives in a trough with a large rolling stone, but most owners around here send their crops to a hydraulic press. Still, it is all local oil, and the customary classifications of virginity (according to acidic content: *vergine, fino vergine, soprafino vergine,* and this, completely neutral *extra vergine* of the first pressing) seems cynical, rude.

We drift on to another subject. Leo is telling me his impressions of the Sharon trial in New York, which he had attended as an observer. "He knew every building in Beirut," says Leo, his eyes glistening. "Every house and every street." This is, then, the happy opposite of the Moro affair, I keep thinking, a success story in democracy. Somehow it all fits in, then, somehow it all comes down to streets and houses, to open and closed doors, to the savage pruning of olives.

But the time is nearly two in the morning, and we must go to bed. We turn off the lights in the library. The volumes of Guglielmo Ferrero are plunged into darkness. Ascending the stairs, I prepare for a sleepless night.

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor for Chronicles.

On 'The Reagan Court'

The Cultural Revolutions, page 6, July *Chronicles*, brings up the matter of Thurgood Marshall, which in view of the current alignments being formed regarding the pending Supreme Court appointment is worth examining.

Marshall's background: 1933 graduated Howard University Law School; 1934 with Baltimore NAACP; 1936 joined national staff NAACP; 1938 chief legal counsel NAACP; 1940 director-counsel NAACP legal defense and educational fund; 1961 appointed to 2nd Circuit; 1965 appointed Solicitor General; 1967 appointed Supreme Court. It would be stretching the mind beyond the limit to imagine a lawyer with, say, the John Birch Society, for 27 years, being appointed to the Supreme Court.

An interesting sidelight. The leadoff national TV news (June 29) on two networks and *Nightline* had to do with the situation in Korea. CBS led off with the Court, including much from Joe Biden, and discussed the seriousness of the matter for a full five minutes, followed by in-depth coverage of home sales, air pollution, and the AIDS donor in LA for six minutes. Then a break and on to Korea.

Richard L. Barkley
Palo Alto, CA

On 'The 1987 Jefferson Lecture'

The editorial in the August issue of *Chronicles* concerning the Jefferson lectureship for 1988 was both judicious and informative; nonetheless, some of the points made require further clarification. The question for conservatives on the council, as far as I can ascertain, was not one of choosing between Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet. Both candidates were entirely acceptable, and conservative members were hoping to confer the lectureship on Kirk and Nisbet in successive years.

Unfortunately, some members of the council treated one of these two architects of postwar intellectual conservatism with undeserved contempt. Indeed the ridicule heaped on Dr. Kirk was so implausible that one might never have associated it with the author of the fine essay on Ralph Ellison in *Chronicles* (August 1987), let alone with the father of *The Conservative Mind*. The circumstances and intemperateness of these attacks led some to speculate that those who leveled them were going after others besides Dr. Kirk. Members of the council were known to be disparaging Kirk even before the meeting convened to elect the Jefferson lecturer. Moreover, it was possible and certainly defensible to vote for Professor Nisbet without vilifying the other recipient of the 1985 Ingersoll Prizes. The invectives against Kirk were taken, rightly or wrongly, as veiled attacks on his considerable following in the Old Right. Significantly, some of those who spoke against him were also involved in the character assassination of M.E. Bradford when that honorable gentleman came up for consideration as NEH Director.

None of these remarks is intended to discredit the outcome of the recent vote for the Jefferson lecturer. Like your editorialist, I was delighted by the choice of Robert Nisbet but saddened by the growing ugliness of conservative wars. The disparagement of Russell Kirk is only the most recent illustration of spiteful squabbling on what for want of a better term must be called the Intellectual Right. That the NEH has been used by one side to advance its members, while humiliating its opponents, will not bring conservative wars to an end. Ironically, those in this confrontation who have raised civility and democracy to religious virtues have been the rudest and most arrogant.

Paul Gottfried, Editor
Modern Thought
The World & I

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SCREEN

Full Force

by Katherine Dalton

Full Metal Jacket; directed by Stanley Kubrick; screenplay by Kubrick, Michael Herr, and Gustav Hasford; based on the novel _The Short-Timers_ by Hasford; Warner Bros.

Funny, that a film about "Vietnam as it really was," as *Platoon* was touted, should fall so wide of any mark of merit, and that Vietnam films with a surreal twist—*Apocalypse Now* and Kubrick's latest, *Full Metal Jacket*—should be so much more interesting. If only Kubrick had stuck with the movie he started with, instead of switching gears entirely after the first third, we might have really had something here; another Kubrickian warped reality, to be sure, but nonetheless fascinating for that.

Full Metal Jacket traces the fate of a young man (dubbed Private Joker by his sergeant) from training at Parris Island, South Carolina, through the Tet offensive. Joker (Matthew Modine) is the central character of this movie, but only slowly and only after about a half hour's worth of film do we really begin to focus on him. Up to that point the screen is dominated by the coarse running commentary and orders from Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, played wonderfully by Lee Emery.

Hartman is molding a bunch of soft kids into killers. It's that plain and that simple, and all cards are on the barrel. He will use any tactic that works—intimidation, force, physical abuse, peer pressure. There is no malice in him, but that only makes him that much more awful to watch. "I do not look down on niggers," he hollers, and rattles through a list of racial slurs. "You are all equally worthless here." "Make your war face," he yells at Joker; "*Make your war face*—you don't scare me; work on it." "You are so ugly," he tells another, "you could be a piece of modern art." It is terrible, but as delivered by Emery (a former sergeant in real life who actually wrote many of his own lines) it is also very funny. Right from the start the audience is giggling, and so is the recruit Hartman dubs Private Gomer Pyle, until Hartman takes him by the neck and chokes the smile off his face, and ours. Marines, as Hartman tells his charges, are not to think even of dying without permission.

It is all horrible and beautifully done. Kubrick descends slowly from the funny into the frightening, and from the frightening into hell. Seeing Pyle trying to maneuver his fat self through a seemingly endless obstacle course, with a screaming Hartman perched at every turn, is still funny. Watching the recruits lined up in a double row on Christmas Day singing Happy Birthday Dear Jesus is disturbing, but still funny. One afternoon Hartman mentions Charles Whitman and Lee Harvey Oswald. Whitman, he reminds the recruits, was the sniper at the University of Texas who picked people off from a distance of 400 yards, and Oswald plugged Kennedy in a moving car from 250 feet. "Where do you boys think these men learned how to shoot?" Hartman bellows. Even this is funny, still.

But in an effort to motivate Pyle, Hartman takes to punishing the rest of the group every time Pyle makes a mistake, which is often. One night, when everyone's had it, the recruits gag Pyle and beat him up. After this, Pyle takes to talking to his gun; but he gets motivated. He turns out to be an excellent shot, and he starts getting everything else right, as well.

The night before graduation, Joker, on fire watch, finds Pyle in the head with his rifle loaded: full metal jacket. Hartman hears them and storms in, professionally furious as usual. Though the tension is high it's just the same thing all over again, Hartman yelling and Pyle taking it, half sick and half funny, until Pyle shoots the sergeant full in the chest, then sticks the barrel in his own mouth and rips the back of his head off.

It is perfect, concise, horrible, hell; a minimovie complete. You get the message loud and clear, and there's nothing banal about it. Why, then, does Kubrick press on with the much more traditional second half to his story? Which *is* banal? Which effectively ruins the first part?

Kubrick's characters are almost always done well, but they are, almost always, upstaged by the movie itself. Who remembers the names of any of the astronauts in 2001? You remember Hal, though, and that spinning-through-time death sequence. Putting small men into a larger-than-life movie is practically a Kubrick trademark. It is the same here. Though by this time in *Full Metal Jacket* we can distinguish Joker from the rest (after boot camp he's allowed to grow his hair back, which helps), he still seems an odd choice for a main character. There's just not that much to him. We like Joker for standing up to Hartman—once, on a religious question—and dislike him for joining in to beat up poor dumb Pyle. We can see he's a cynic, doing a barely passable John Wayne imitation. Otherwise, what is there? To compare him with the characters in Platoon, Joker is not, like

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Elias, a good soldier fighting a bad war, or like Chris, green and maybe a little stupid but still capable of getting by and, when the times comes, of wreaking his own justice with a rifle.

Joker is something real to *Platoon*'s paper cutouts, but he's not something especially admirable. He's gotten himself assigned as a reporter for *Stars & Stripes*, which means he's a hack for the military PR—a not entirely willing one, but still a hack. He's not even a proper poor slob of a grunt sure to see action; he's behind it.

Our hero is no hero; nothing even close. You could call him an antihero, maybe. Kubrick certainly undermines him all the way. When the big moment comes, when Joker's friend Cowboy is shot through by a sniper and dies in Joker's arms, he does set his jaw as true John Wayne tradition dictates and goes after the killer. But he doesn't get him. Or rather, he doesn't get her—the sniper who has decimated this patrol ends up being a teenage girl. Joker runs out of bullets once he finds her and drops his gun in the confusion of being fired at. His little sidekick, the erstwhile so innocent Rafterman, is the one who actually shoots her down, yelping and grinning like a hound that's ripped its first fox.

While it happens to be Joker who ends up giving the coup de grace, that coup de grace is really a mercy bullet she is begging for. Some victory, Kubrick is saying; some revenge, and some war.

Kubrick seems fascinated not by characters but by the lack, the butt-end, the eradication of personality. Think again of *2001*, or of *A Clockwork Orange*. What Hartman has started, Kubrick's Vietnam finishes. The war has given Kubrick another forum on which to stage his favored cult of the antipersonality. There is so little in this movie of what normally defines a man. With two small exceptions, we never learn where any of the characters are from. We don't get their real names, either, just their nicknames, many of which were given contemptuously by Hartman. Barely, and only because of Tet, do we learn when all this is happening. These men are only so much matter in a moral void—one simply there and given, a hell that popped up full-formed out of Kubrick's odd head. Is this a political movie or only Stanley Kubrick once again falling in love with a hell of his own making?

Katherine Dalton writes from New York.

Gluttons for Punishment

by Gary S. Vasilash

Recently, NBC News, and the *Wall Street Journal* devoted features to what they claim, to an editor, is an American "obsession" with being thin. There may have been many more reports devoted to the topic—now that the passive-smoke issue is passé, people are refocusing their attention on the state of bustlines, waistlines, buttocks form, etc., etc., etc.

For years, people have struggled with diet, stuffing themselves with bran or grapefruit or rice, while attempting to abstain from foods that don't leave the abdominal region feeling like a bowling alley. The other part of the equation is exercise. Despite the efforts of running-shoe manufacturers and Vic Tanny ads showing Cher looking like she just crawled off the set of *Mad Max IV*, working out is usually meant to make proper clothes fit well. And who would want to sweat in ultracostly ensembles?

The point is, both diet and exercise require suffering. No matter how strong the desire to look good, the physics of inertia and the instinct for calories from nonnutritional sources (e.g., White Castle hamburgers, hot fudge sundaes) are more compelling. Today's pop-culture person is in a quandary.

But medical technology has come to the rescue. Now we can have our Dove Bar and eat it too.

The July issue of *D*, the Dallas city magazine, includes a feature modestly titled "The Ultimate Insider's Guide to Dallas." We are made to realize we are not merely in Texas, which in itself is astounding, but in its pivotal point. One article in the guide is "The Women: Why They Look So Good" and explains why Dallas has "more than its share of gorgeous women." The authors (two women) maintain the reason for this blessedness is that the Dallas Woman spends inordinate time curling eyelashes, applying makeup, and, yes, actually exercising in outfits Ordinary Women can only gaze at in fashion magazines.

But the real reason why there are so many daughters of Aphrodite in Dallas is to be found on the following page. It's not magical, nor is it chemical—more to the point, it is medical. So much for romance. The page in question includes an ad for the Aesthetic Surgical Center, which is not to be confused with your local College of Beauty Culture.

At the risk of providing a free ad for the firm, the level to which medical science has taken us must be cited in a hungry Homeric list. To wit:

*Abdomen: Abdominoplasty, suction-assisted lipectomy (SAL)

*Arms: Lipectomy, SAL

*Breasts: Augmentation mammoplasty, gynecomastia, mastopexy, reduction mammoplasty

*Buttocks: Buttock lift, fat reintroduction, SAL

*Cheeks: Malar augmentation, SAL

*Chin: Augmentation mentoplasty, reduction mentoplasty, submental SAL

*Ears: Otoplasty

*Eyes: Accents permanent lash-liner, blepharoplasty

*Face: Forehead lift, rhytidectomy, SAL

*Hair: Flaps, plugs, scalp reduction

*Hips: SAL

*Mouth: Augmentation cheiloplasty, reduction cheiloplasty

*Nose: Rhinoplasty

*Skin: Chemabrasion, dermabrasion, zyderm collagen, zyplast collagen

*Thighs: SAL, thigh lift

Certainly, one can only stare in wonder at this technological arsenal of plastic reconfiguration.

Far be it from me to impugn the beauty of the women of Dallas. I lust in my heart as well as the next guy. But the whole thing strikes me as analogous to the food-engineered Butterball turkey: It sure may look good, but it can't sing.

Gary Vasilash eats hamburgers, triglycerides notwithstanding.

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